University of Alberta

Pedagogy of Examinations:

A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations

by

Shuying Li ©

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 2005

Library and
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

0-494-08675-0

Your file Votre référence
ISBN:
Our file Notre reference
ISBN:

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Shenhao Li, who constantly prompts me to wonder, "What is in the best interest of this child at this moment?"

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear wife, Huixia Chen, who, as a teacher and mother, constantly produces challenging ideas for me to ponder upon, - we both share the pains and joys of the research journey together.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my mother Zhenglan Wang and my father Wenda Li for their endless love and care.

Abstract

The present research explores phenomenologically how tests and examinations are experienced by Chinese students and how these experiences and underlying school practices may be pedagogically interpreted and understood.

The study starts from the observation that there already exists a large body of research literature regarding educational examinations and tests, assessment and measurement. Much of this literature focuses on the political, educational and economic aspects of exams, or discusses technical issues of test construction (e.g., factor analysis, item response theory), psychometrical analysis of exams (e.g., test validity and reliability studies, test effectiveness and outcomes, computer-based test research and design), and so on. However, little research has pursued the question how students actually experience the tests and exams to which they are subjected, and how they experience life in schools and school systems that are increasingly test and examination driven.

The study first presents a cultural historical view of the tradition of examinations in China, dating back several thousand years. In recent decades, however, the cultural purpose of examinations seems to have shifted.

Next, the experiential reality of tests and exams in children's lives is pursued through accounts written or told by young people and adults. Through such hermeneutic phenomenological methods of writing, interview, observation and the exploration of experiential sources, this study has gathered a wide variety of narrative data, in anecdote form, that describe in particular and concrete terms students' experiences of examinations and tests. In the main chapters of this dissertation the experiential accounts are presented, thematized, and reflectively discussed.

Subsequently, a pedagogical discussion aims to problematize how educators need to reflect on their examination and assessment practices--especially since these practices fundamentally seem to shape the everyday reality of teaching and learning.

This research aims to contribute towards a thoughtful pedagogy of examination. As well, the study aims to create a space for intercultural dialogues about the pedagogy of tests and examinations between East and West.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are extended to Dr. Max van Manen, my supervisor and my teacher. He is, in my eyes, not only a true scholar, a great educator, but also a thoughtful pedagogue. I thank him for all he has done for me in the journey of "re-searching the lived experience" in the lifeworld that I and others have lived through. It has always been a great pleasure and honor to work so closely with the education master and get his hands-on guidance in the academic journey.

Thank-you also goes to my other supervisory committee members Dr. Ingrid Johnston and Dr. David Geoffrey Smith, for their enlightening teaching of critical pedagogy and globalization issues in education and more. It was a great pleasure for me to sit in their classes and learn to be critically pedagogical and open to all educational possibilities. I also thank them for their insightful comments and advice for my research.

I want to thank Dr. George Buck and Dr. George Richardson for sitting in my oral exam committee and spending much time reading and providing me with insightful questions on my study. They are both my teachers and my friends.

A thank-you note also goes to Dr. McClelland, my external examiner, for spending much time in the summer holidays reading my dissertation and offering me insightful comments.

I want to thank Dr. Olenka Bilash and Dr. Terry Carson as well for their academic support and encouragement. I cherish them in my mind.

Thanks are due to all the staff in the Department of Secondary Education for such an open, supportive and friendly academic atmosphere. Thanks are also extended to Dr. Munling Lo and the academic staff in the Center for Learning-study and School Partnership of Hong Kong Institute of Education for their encouragement and support.

I want to thank all the participants in my research: the students, teachers, parents and scholars in China and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Their open sharing of their stories makes this dissertation possible.

I also own my deep gratitude to Mr. Malcolm W. Fast and Avau Fast, for their true friendship, love and encouragement.

A big thank-you also goes to my dear wife, Huixia Chen, for her love and helping me through in my research journey. We share the pains and joys through the journey.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the FSIDA funding that supported part of this research project.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 CHINA EXAM TESTS NERVES OF MILLIONS OF STUDENTS 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF EXAMINATIONS IN THE EDUCATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS 1
1.2 FORMULATING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH QUESTION 7
1.3 PERSONAL BACKGROUND 14
1.4 REFLECTION 21
1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW 23
1.6 THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION 27

CHAPTER 2 SKETCHING THE BACKGROUND 28

2.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EXAMINATIONS IN CHINA 30
2.2 RECENT EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN CHINA 43
2.3 CONFUCIUS' INFLUENCE AND SHAPING OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN CHINA 47

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 52

3.1 PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY: ORIENTING OURSELVES TO THE LIFE WORLD 52
3.1.1 Phenomenology as human science 53
3.1.2 Phenomenology as a research methodology 54
3.1.3 Anecdotes and stories from the life-world 55
3.2 COLLECTING DATA (LIVED EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTIONS - LEDS) 58
3.2.1 Selecting schools in China for the research 59
3.2.2 Designing the interview questions and guidelines for writing anecdotes 61
3.2.3 Phenomenological Interviews 63

CHAPTER 4 STUDENT'S LIVED EXPERIENCE OF EXAMINATIONS 65

I AM A LOW GRADE STUDENT 66
AN UNWORTHY NOBODY 67
I AM ONLY A NUMBER, NOTHING MORE OR LESS 69
BEING PUT AWAY 69
SIMPLY CAN'T GET AWAY 71
AFTER ALL, I KNOW THAT I AM A SUPERIOR STUDENT 72
DAD IS MORE NERVOUS THAN I AM, FOR I FELT HIS HAND TREMBLE 73
EIGHTEEN YEARS OF LIFE HAS CARRIED TOO MUCH PRESSURE 74
WAITING FOR THE DAY THE RESULTS WILL BE ANNOUNCED 75
GETTING THE RESULTS 76
THE PRESSURE OF SILENCE 77
THE SOUND OF PENS WRITING 77
THE AIR IS SO TENSE 78
DAYDREAM 79
MORE MARKS 80
TEACHER PRAISE 81
WHAT IS ALL THIS FOR? 82
I RETOOK THE EXAM 83
PRESSURE 84
THE EXPERIENCE OF CHEATING IN THE EXAM 85
SCARED 86
PRODIGY 87
DON'T PLAY 88
THEN HE BEATS ME 89
SHE FINALLY MADE IT 90
I FEEL THAT THE DOOR BEGAN TO DISTANCE ME FROM MY MOM AND DAD 91
RECOGNITION 92

Now that student is number 1 ... 93
Caught in Cheating in the exam ... 94
Examination Moment ... 96
Fairness ... 97
We should be honest, shouldn't we! ... 97

CHAPTER 5 INTERPRETING THEMES ... 99

CHAPTER 6 PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF THE LIVED MEANINGS OF STUDENTS' EXAMINATION EXPERIENCES ... 148

Tracing the etymological origin of examination ... 148
Examinations and tests are unique "educational" experiences ... 151
In exam driven schools, students are "asked" to experience their relative worth ... 154
In exam driven schools, tests and exams are not just discrete events ... 157
In China, examinations may be experienced as family events or affairs ... 159
Examinations and tests are strongly emotion laden experiences ... 163
Exams may be experienced as number ... 167
Exams may tempt children into cheating ... 172
The exam carries the significance of parental and teacher expectations ... 175
Students may experience test smartness ... 176
Exam oriented learning may be experienced as monotonous and tedious ... 178
Life in exam oriented classroom may be experienced as being marginalized ... 182

CHAPTER 7 THE PEDAGOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDENTS' EXAMINATION EXPERIENCES ... 186

Study and play ... 186
Self identity ... 190
Face sensitivity ... 196
Examination and assessment practice in classrooms ... 200
Developing a sensitive and thoughtful pedagogy of examination ... 204
A. Maintaining an experiential orientation to student's test and exam events by remembering and writing practice ... 205
B. Awareness of the cultural experience ... 208
C. Pedagogical tact and its implications for educational practice ... 210
D. Pedagogical tact and awareness for potential damage to the student ... 216

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION ... 219

BIBLIOGRAPHY ... 229

APPENDIX I ETHICAL APPLICATION FORM ... 253

APPENDIX II LIVED EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTION WRITING INSTRUCTION ... 257

APPENDIX III INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ... 259

APPENDIX IV RESEARCH CONSENT FORM (FOR PARTICIPANTS ABOVE 18) ... 261

APPENDIX V RESEARCH CONSENT FORM (FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN) ... 262

APPENDIX VI CHINA GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS ... 263

教育部关于积极推进中小学评价与考试制度改革的通知 ... 263
(THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCEMENT ON ACTIVELY PROMOTING AND PUSHING FORWARD THE REFORM ON THE ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION SYSTEM IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION) ... 263
中共中央国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定 ... 267
(THE STATE COUNCIL DECISION ON FURTHER EDUCATION REFORM AND TO PROMOTING THE QUALITY EDUCATION) ... 267
国务院关于基础教育改革与发展的决定 ... 274

(THE STATE COUNCIL DECISION ON BASIC EDUCATION REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT) 274
基础教育课程改革纲要(试行)......281
(THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DOCUMENT ON OUTLINE OF BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM REFORM) 281

Chapter 1 China Exam Tests Nerves of Millions of Students

1.1 Introduction: The role of examinations in the education of Chinese students

Chinese cities today are diverting traffic, suspending construction and banning street hawking to reduce the stress on high school students as they begin grueling national college entrance exams on Tuesday.

The pressure has already proven too much for one 18-year-old student from the western province of Qinghai, who killed his mother over the weekend with a stone after they argued over his refusal to take the test, the Web site www.sina.com reported.

Students and parents across China view the four-day exam as the key to a competitive future, but few students will actually make the grade. "Passing the college entrance exams is the only way for

Chinese youth to gain access to higher education," Xinhua said in an overnight report on Monday.

"This year, a total of 8.67 million people have registered for the exams, but only one in every four test-takers will eventually be eligible for university enrolment."

"Guangdong province in southern China ordered traffic away from many exam sites and banned construction activities and blaring radios from streets near schools to keep test rooms quiet," China Daily said on Tuesday. Similar quiet zones have been set up around the country. A Beijing neighborhood was draped with red banners on Tuesday reading "build a quiet testing community".

Schools are also concerned about cheating, a widespread practice with so much riding on the test. More than 3,000 exam takers across China were punished for "violating test discipline" last year, Xinhua said. Schools in Yingkou, in the northeastern province of Liaoning, had installed electronic shielding devices to block mobile telephone signals, it said. In recent years, scores of students have been found getting test answers sent as text messages to their mobile phones.

Students across China had to sign "no-cheating" pledges before they were given their test booklets, Xinhua said.

(From Lateline News: 2005-June-06)

Every year on July 7th, 8th and 9th, the standardized national College Entrance Examinations (CEE) takes place, involving millions of high school graduates. Since 2004, the dates have moved to June, to avoid the summer heat. The exam days vary from two to four days. The students flock to the examination halls located in various cities throughout China. This is such a decisive event in their future life that the mere mention of the term "Gaokao" (College Entrance Examinations) often causes great anxiety and intense feelings of panic among these young people. High school graduates call it "Black July". Before this major examination event, most of the exam participants have already passed the high school diploma exams, and the various provincial, municipal, district and school level simulated exams. And these are only the students that participate in the national standardized College Entrance Examinations. About twenty days prior, two other major educational examination events at more or less the same scale and level of importance are also the big topic of daily talks. One is the elementary school graduation examination and the other is the junior high school graduation examination. Both are selective examinations that provide entrance to a higher rung of the academic ladder. And prior to these major decisive examination events for young students, there are numerous small-scale examinations, such as grade exams, term exams, midterm exams, unit exams, simulated exams, and so forth.

Alfie Kohn observes about US schools that children are tested to an extent that is unprecedented in the history and unparalleled anywhere else in the world. The result is that most of today's discourses about education have been reduced to a crude series of monosyllables: "The test scores are too low. Make them go up" (Kohn, 2000, p. 45). Perhaps these comments are truer for China than for any other country. Standardized testing, especially "high stakes" exams are very common and popular in the Chinese educational system. They are influential in the educational lives of students. Perhaps no other single nation's education is more test-driven than that of China. It is no overstatement that students in China spend most of their school life studying, preparing for, and taking part in various exams from a very early age. The term "Kaoshi" (exam) is perhaps the most frequently heard phrase among teachers, students, parents, and grandparents. The examination atmosphere is best described with words such as competitive, expectant, anxious, fearful, excited, motivated, joyful, etc. But even these terms fall short of the depth, scope, and complexity of meaning of the experience itself.

There is no doubt that the examination system puts tremendous pressures on many students. It is not uncommon to read newspaper stories of students who have committed suicide or engaged in other desperate acts. For example, the Yangtse Evening newspaper reported how a young man, who several times failed the College Entrance Examinations, could no longer bear the pressure and had run away from his hometown. He was later found by a local policeman in Wujiang County of Jiangsu province, a place about thousand miles away from his home village in Henan Province (*Yangtze Evening News*, Aug 1, 2003).

In Liaoning province a high school graduate swallowed a whole bottle of agricultural chemicals, causing her death. This happened several days after the national standardized College Entrance Exams of July 2001. After she had returned from school, she had tried to estimate her total exam marks. She calculated that her results would only be about 520, which was slightly higher than the minimum required for admission to an ordinary university. But thinking that there was no hope to enter a zhongdian (prestigious) university, she decided to end her sufferings. Three days later, the province announced the official marks: she had apparently made a score of 543! This grade actually surpassed the admission standard set for the zhongdian universities (see the *Chinese Education Research Network*, July 21, 2001).

The Duowei News describes how many students suffer from "pre-exam syndrome"--a syndrome, according to doctors' analysis, that causes a series of uncomfortable symptoms when exams are approaching, such as extreme nervousness, panic, and depression. Many students feel incapacitated by intellectual incompetence, poor memory, difficulty of concentration, and lack of confidence. They appear physically exhausted; suffer from frequent urination, insomnia, and demonstrate a lack of appetite, irregular menstruation, and so forth (*Duowei News*, June 22, 2001).

The accounts of desperate acts by individual students is further complicated when historical, cultural, and social dimensions are taken into account. More such information is available online in Chinese at these URLs: http://www.edu.cn/HomePage/jiao_yu_fu_wu/gao_kao/jian_ya_zhong_xin/index.shtml and, http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2005-06/09/content_3062024.htm

1.2 Formulating the phenomenological research question

During the winter of 2000, the Edmonton Journal columnist, Liane Faulder, did an investigative report of Chinese schools. In her extensive newspaper article she notes that the high pressure-driven examination system in China has been severely criticized by Western commentators as well as by Chinese educators. "In our exam-oriented and screening culture, we've screened out a lot of students," says Raymond Young (Faulder, Feb 24, 2000). And the examination driven curriculum limits the educational value of how and what students learn. Faulder found that many Chinese students think school is boring. "There is too much homework and the teachers are stuck in a medieval mentality which emphasizes order and diligence over original thinking" (Faulder, Feb 24, 2000).

A criticism that is often repeated in and outside China is that the Chinese exams emphasize rote memorization of texts. Critics of the system, as well as many students, feel that exam-takers are forced to memorize vast amounts of disconnected trivia, which are regurgitated during the exams and then forgotten. The emphasis on preparation for examinations based on rote memorization is a problem that permeates the entire school system. Education reform advocates say that students are denied the opportunity to develop creativity and independent thinking (Choi, 1999; Watkins & Biggs, 2001).

However, some educators express a different view. And they note that the Chinese examination-oriented education produces good students. In the International Olympic Math Contest that took place in July, 2001, in Washington D.C., most of the participants were Chinese (Canadian Mathematic Society news, 12 July 2001; Duowei news, 10 July 2001). In a recent comparative study, a series of tests to measure computation ability and as well as the ability to apply knowledge of mathematics was given to children. The researchers found that American children scored significantly lower than Chinese students in nearly all categories. "In addition to being more effective problem solvers, Chinese children also solve problems more quickly than the American children" (Stevenson, et al. 1990, p.1).

In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study 1999 (TIMSS), the mathematics and science achievements of eighth-grade students from 38 countries were compared. Students from Singapore, China Taipei, Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, and Japan ranked the first to fifth. Canadian students ranked 10th in math and 13th in science, while US students ranked 19th in math and 18th in science (TIMSS-R, 1999 <http ://nces.ed.gov/ timss/ >). Although Mainland China did not participate in TIMSS 1999. Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Korea and Singapore are very much like China in that their education systems are all very much exam-driven (Justine Su, 1999).

The most recent PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report 2004 shows a more or less similar result (For a detailed statement of the PISA report result, see their website: http://www.pisa.oecd.org/).

One could question the meaning of "academic ranking", and yet Watkins and Biggs (1996, 2001) in their two books (*The Chinese Learner, Teaching the Chinese Learner*) further claim that "Chinese learners are commonly misunderstood by westerners" (2001, p.3), since a number of accepted principles of western educational psychology that reported in their books, according to their research, "did not appear to transfer easily to Chinese learners" (p. 3). They called it "paradox of the Chinese learner" (2001, p. 3).

Carol S. Huntsinger did a four-year longitudinal study of 80 families (40 Chinese-American and 40 European-American). She describes the Chinese-American parents' perspective on homework: "They tend not to create a dichotomy between work and play. They believe that memorization and practice are essential to learning. They believe that teaching their children is an important part of the parental role" (Huntsinger, 2000, p. 45). Huntsinger found that many of the Chinese-American parents in the study believe that schools in the United States do not give enough homework to children in the primary grades.

Chinese-American parents are puzzled when American parents complain about homework to school officials at parent meetings. Rather than speak out, they quietly construct homework. Coming from a culture that emphasizes the importance of hard work in achievement, Chinese-American parents believe that the homework habit needs to be established early. They give their children homework beginning in preschool. Chinese American families view homework time as 'family time'. Often the whole family sits around the dining table doing homework together. According to Huntsinger, the younger children in the family may request homework from their parents so they can participate with their older siblings. Many parents assign their children regular summer homework. They believe that "homework not only builds their children's foundation skills and competencies but also builds the discipline, concentration and self-motivation required for academic endeavors" (Huntsinger, 2000, p. 47). However, what is lacking in this research are the children's voices. While Huntsinger explores the parents' perceptions she does not investigate how Chinese children experience and feel about their parents' values and practices.

Howard Gardner, professor of education and developmental psychology at Harvard University, has conducted several large collaborative projects with China during the 1980s. Gardner observes that American and Chinese students use two different ways to learn. He asks, "Is it better to let children learn a task by experimenting or to teach them exactly how to do it?" The answer depends on whether your values are American or Chinese" (Gardner, 1989a. p. 4). He contrasts the Western, more "revolutionary" view, with a more "evolutionary" view espoused by the Chinese. "There is a virtual reversal of priorities: the young Westerner making her boldest departures first and then gradually reintegrating herself into the tradition; and the young Chinese being almost inseparable from the tradition, but, over time, possibly evolving to a point as deviant as the one initially staked out by the innovative Westerner" (Gardner, 1989b, p. 55). Gardner, like Huntsinger, does have little to say about the students who are at the center of these debates.

What Huntsinger, Gardner and others observe in their research is that there are cultural differences in the ways that East and West view learning and knowledge. They rightfully point out that these differences are poorly understood. It would be wrong to confuse the Chinese education system with Western thoughts about the meaning and pedagogical significance of examinations, knowledge, learning, and memorization. These notions must be understood against a background of relevant cultural traditions and historical developments. But what is also poorly understood is how the children experience and are socially, psychologically, and personally taxed by the cultural practices of the examination driven systems.

So, on the one hand, there exists a huge volume of technical research documents on examinations and tests in the area of psychometrics, statistics, and quantitative genetics (for example, Stevenson, 1992; Stigler, 1990, 1991; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Gardner, 1990; Huntsinger, 2000; Faulder, 2000; Haladyna, Nolen, & Hass, 1991; Herman & Golan, 1993; Herman, Abedi, & Golan, 1994; Jones & Whitford, 1997; Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, & Madaus, 1995; Madaus, 1985; Paris, Lawton, Turner, & Roth, 1991; Rotberg, 1995; Salganik, 1985). On the other hand, there exists a fairly extensive volume of literature debating on the effectiveness, outcomes, and quality of the Chinese exam-driven educational system (See Mirazaki, 1976; Su, Yuming, 1994, 1999; Choi, 1999; Pong, et al, 2001; Heyneman, 1988).

Educational examinations are part of educational assessment practices. And in this area, there is also a huge volume of research literature on assessment practice in schools. Particularly in the past 10 years, more and more research is focused on formative assessment practices instead of summative assessment studies. For a detailed research literature, see Atkin M. J., Black, P. and Coffey, J. (2001), Bell, B. and Cowie, B. (2001), Biggs, J. (1996), Biggs, J. & Watkins, D.A. (Eds.), (1996, reprinted 1999), Biggs, J. & Watkins, D.A. (Eds.). (2001), Brady, L. and Kennedy, K. (2001), Bryant, S. and Timmins, A. (2002), Clarke, S. (2001), Danielson, C. and Abrutyn, L. (1997), Gagnon, Jr. G.W. and Collay, M. (2001), Klenowski, V. (2002), Palomba, C. (1999), Pellegrino, J., Chudowsky, N. and Glaser, R. (2001), Torrance, H. & Pryor, J. (1998), Banta, T. (1999), Biggs, J. (1995), Black, P. (1999), Black, P. (1998), Dassa, C. et al. (1993), Dougherty, M. J. (1997), Diez, M. (1998), Farrell-Childers, P.B. and Lowry, M. (1997), Maki, P.L. (2002), McCallum, B.(2001), Palomba, C.A.,(2001), Palomba, C.A.,(2000), Sadler, D.R. (1998), Yung, B. H. W.(2000). This body of literature and more are arguing and seeking to develop technical strategies in producing "learning oriented assessment" models.

However, it is somewhat of a shocking discovery that there is no literature that explores the pedagogical significance of the examinations for student lives. We know even less about how children actually experience examinations.

This lack of literature and knowledge about student examination experiences suggests questions such as: How do Chinese students actually experience the test-driven education? What do examinations mean to them? And what is the pedagogical significance of these experiences?

More precisely this study aims to explore the following research question: "How are examinations experienced by Chinese students and how may these experiences and underlying school practices be pedagogically interpreted and understood?"

1.3 Personal background

My interest in this research question has been shaped by my personal experiences, first as a student, then as an educator and educational administrator in China, and more recently as a visiting scholar and doctoral student in Canada.

I attended school under the examination-driven educational system in Hunan Province of the People's Republic of China, during the 1970s and early 1980s. As a student, I had to do well on numerous large and small exams, until eventually, after taking the series of national college entrance examinations, I was admitted to Hunan Teachers' University.

Four years later, after passing the hurdles of the national graduate school entrance examinations, I was again lucky enough to be able to pursue my postgraduate studies in Nanjing Teachers' University. After graduation, I became a teacher myself. My first appointment was at a senior high school and next at a prestigious university in Nanjing. As a teacher and administrator, I have prepared students for numerous exams. During my administrative work as Deputy Chair of the Department of Basic Sciences and then Chair of Foreign Language Education Department (from 1995-1999), I was appointed as the Deputy Director for the National College English band 4-6 Exam Supervision Committee in Northern Division of the great Nanjing area. As one of the lucky survivors of those rigid exams, I have gone through the fears and excitements, hopes and frustrations, joys and sorrows that many other students also experienced.

I still remember one day very clearly. It was a Thursday afternoon in the early summer of 1978. I had finished all two-day provincial elementary school graduation examinations. Before the examinations, Mr. Gao, our class teacher in charge (homeroom teacher) reminded us again and again, "Work hard, do the examinations seriously. Don't let down your teachers and parents! These examinations will determine whether you enter an 'A' class or an 'ordinary' class in the junior high school!" The practice of dividing the classes in the same grade into categories had just started at that time. "A" class would enjoy the privileges of having the best teaching staff and resources. I remember how parents were discussing the results.

Somehow I managed to enter the 'A' class in Grade 7. There was only one 'A' Class in each grade. I felt lucky that I was one of the top 50 students in the grade. Many of my classmates were not so lucky. Because of failure to secure a position rank in the first 50, they had to sit in the 'ordinary classes'.

As an educator in China, like many of my Chinese colleagues, I would criticize the highly competitive examinations for the limited number of universities, schools and teaching resources in China. I sometimes saw the good side of these exams from both a political and educational outcome point of view, though I often heard strong criticism and attacks from various social circles. For example, I thought the establishment of key schools could produce maximum educational returns in the shortest time, particularly to produce more qualified graduates for higher level institutions in order to meet the immediate growing manpower demand. I was aware that, given the long Chinese tradition and culture of examinations, the system surely had its own reason to survive. Conditions have been changing drastically. The rates of enrollment, the number of schools and universities and the other teaching resources has increased dramatically in the past three decades. Yet, the exam-driven system still prevails, and in an even more intense form.

After teaching in a university in Nanjing for ten years, I was given the chance of traveling to Canada as a visiting scholar sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Education, in April 1998. This was my first trip abroad. It broadened my thinking. As a Chinese educator I was so used to the traditional ways of schooling that I experienced quite a shock when observing and experiencing Canadian classrooms.

During the fall of 1998, I volunteered to teach one hour of ESL to five Chinese students weekly in an elementary school near the University of Alberta campus. This gave me a good chance to observe the school's teaching and learning activities. My first surprise was that students rarely used textbooks, while teachers only had a general description of the provincial curriculum outline of various subjects. Yet, teachers were responsible for all subjects. The second surprise that I experienced was that students seldom had large-scale uniform examinations; neither did they have much homework to do. I was told that, "strangely," the parents of my five Chinese students frequently requested that the class teacher give their children more work to do after school. Another surprise was that the students had a large variety of learning activities besides classroom learning. They had various field trips and diversified learning resources in the school. Furthermore, the school days were so short (from 9:00am – 3:30pm), that I saw parents who did not have time to take care of their children after school place their children in the after school day care center; other parents, thinking that what their children learned in school was far from enough, sent their children to after-school schools or training classes or weekend schools, not to prepare for standardized large scale examination, but to be charged with more knowledge.

Thinking back nine years when I was in Nanjing, I recalled a news broadcast. It showed how Chinese children were forced to learn to take examinations even when they were only in kindergarten. The parents let them take the entrance examinations in the hope their child would qualify for better kindergartens. In the broadcast I saw parents cry when they saw their child fail the exams. Meanwhile the young children themselves still looked puzzled: they knew little about what these exams meant to them.

My son, Hao, who came to Canada with me in 1999, is now 15 years old. Some Canadian friends ask me what it would be like if my son were to return to China. Would he be able to adapt academically to the Chinese educational system? How would he compare with other students? Would he be willing to go back and do his high school in China? I tell these friends that Hao came to Edmonton after he finished Grade 3 in China. So, he has had some experiences in both school systems. He is now a "top" student in his class, but he definitely would not be able to pass the entrance examination to a superior Chinese junior high school if he returns to China.

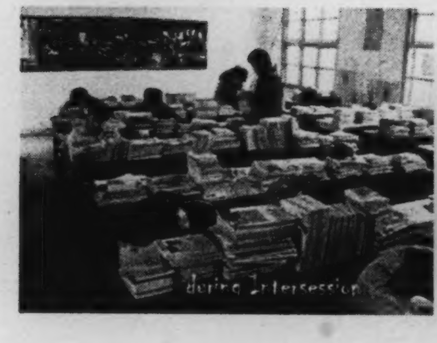
Once in a while, around the dinner table, my wife and I raise the topic of exams with our son, who seems to have an easy time and little homework to do after supper. "Hao, you should study harder. Although you are one of the top students in your class, that is not enough. You know, your friend Yoyo in China would know more than you do now." During the summer holiday, my wife kept urging Hao to study, to review what he had learned in the previous term and prepare for the coming new school term. However, my son kept complaining that his friends in school never study during the vacation. "They told me that the summer holiday is for fun, not for study," he said.

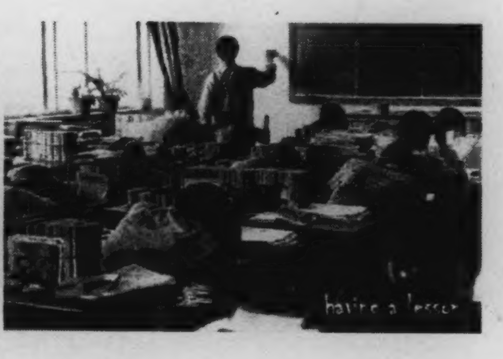
Even when he was in grade 5, Hao told us that he was still using the mathematic knowledge he learned in grade 3 in China! He is now in grade 9, the final year of junior high school. Here is his school routine: He gets up daily at around 7:30 in the morning. The school starts at 8:45 am and ends around 3:00 pm in the afternoon. On Thursday, the school dismisses at 2:00pm, one hour earlier.

I don't see much homework assignment from the school. Hao spends some time playing computer games and during most of his spare time, and he is engaged in playing badminton, his most favorite sport, in the Royal Glenora Club. My wife and I recall how hard it was when we were his age in China. Because of the strong pressure and high expectations from parents and teachers, we basically spent the entire day, from early morning till late at night, studying, doing subject exercises, and memorizing all the material. During trips to China in 2003 and 2004, I had the opportunity to visit schools in the early summer. School seems still very intense for most students.

Recently, I had a chance to take my son back to China to see his grandparents. He was able to visit one of the elite junior high schools in my hometown and talk with the local students of his age. He soon realized that he was far behind those students in subjects like mathematics and science.

With the permission from the school, I took some pictures of the classroom, where my son had the chance of sitting in the class for one period. He was surprised to see the classroom (during the intersession and when having a lesson) like this!





1.4 Reflection

I wrote the above personal background section several weeks ago. And as I now reread the paragraphs I am struck by the tone of my own writing. I realize that I have deeply internalized the values and perspectives of the Chinese educational culture. I find it hard not being critical of the more relaxed and less demanding Canadian schooling environment. I also realize that for students like me (in China) the examination system has been advantageous. The examination system enables the more successful students to come out on top and become socially and economically privileged. I further realize that it is hard not to feel proud and special for having done well and now belonging to the small elite cadre of students.

But living in Canada has made me more sensitive, critical, and attuned to a broader range of values and to the experiences of children who may not be doing so well on exams. I now wonder: What do they experience? What is it like to experience the pressures and results of the various phases of the examination experience? What price do children have to pay for being driven through the examination corals? At what cost do some students succeed and at what cost do other students just pass or perhaps fail? How is examination failure experienced by students who feel that they cannot achieve their goals? What examination pressures do students feel from their families and friends?

These are some of the questions that now visit me when I reflect upon my personal past experience.

1.5 Literature review

There exists an enormous quantity of research and studies on the technical aspects of testing and educational assessment at large and these include debates about testing outcomes and effectiveness as well as how to produce and implement formative assessment. But, surprisingly, thus far, little research has been oriented toward questions of how students experience examinations and tests and how we as educators may understand the pedagogy of exams. Perhaps, Aitken's (1994) study is a rare exception. Aitken conducted a study entitled "A hermeneutic phenomenological investigation of students' experience of test taking" in Albertan schools in Canada. In this study, Aitken conducted interviews, collected narrative writings, and used her own experiences as a test administrator in Alberta. She explored the existential meanings of students' experience on exams through the dimensions of relationality, corporeality, spatiality, and temporality. While Aitken's research is mainly confined to Alberta secondary school education, it does provide a vivid picture of students' experiences of exams. The research done by Dr. Wing Yang Pong (2001) is another exception, which uses an experiential inquiry to look into the student's examination experience in the Hong Kong context.

In China, research on testing and educational examinations has a long history, due to the fact that China has such a long examination history. The earliest research on examinations was perhaps done by Wang Anshi, the state councilor in Sung dynasty in 1200. Wang Anshi was himself a survivor of the rigid Chinese imperial exams. Realizing that the exam system needed to be modified so as to be more selective of more capable candidates for the society, he and his mensheng (disciples) did an extensive study of the exam system and suggested changes to the system. Much of the early research on the exam system would probably not be considered valid research from a modern methodological point of view. Many of the studies were critiques, comments, opinions or unsystematic surveys of exam statistics. Another period of exam research occurred in the late nineteenth century when Western contacts with China became more frequent and China was unable to defend itself during the Opium Wars. After a series of studies and policy proposals had been carried out, more drastic changes to the examination system were introduced. But these changes were mainly on the adjustments of subjects, contents and examination management.

In the last half century, especially since the open door policy was issued in 1978, more research studies have been conducted in China in regards to aspects of exams. Almost all of these studies have been conducted from empirical perspectives, analyzing the political, educational and economic influence, or discussing the methods to generate test items, psychometrical analysis of exams, and so on. In more recent years, specifically, since 1984, more systematic and rigid studies have been conducted.

During April 11 and 25, 1985, a large international conference was held in Beijing on educational testing with participants from many OECD countries. Also in attendance were US organizations such as ETS (Educational Testing Service), NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), and IAEEA (the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement). This conference was initiated by the Chinese government to discuss the issues of examinations and to assist the officials in the Ministry of Education of China to think through some of the policy options in the area of examinations and standardized testing. The conference played a key role in revitalizing research on examinations in China. There was a strong drive behind these studies to select the talented, capable, and most suitable personnel for the country so as to revitalize and strengthen the national economic power.

In 1992, the Research Institute of Testing Science was set up in Central China (Huazhong) Normal University. Thus far it has been the only comprehensive research institute among Chinese Higher Education Institutes that takes responsibility for conducting systematic and comprehensive studies of testing. However, the studies are not comprehensive yet, because much of the research conducted in the center is concerned with sociological, technical, historical and cultural aspects of testing issues.

In 2003, a large conference on examinations and social development was held in Central China (Huazhong) Normal University. This conference was organized by the Examination Science Center and attracted hundreds of scholars from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China. At the conference, many scholars shared their research findings on various aspects of examination processes. This has been perhaps the largest research conference thus far to show a great interest in the issue of examinations in China.

Nonetheless, the large majority of these studies shed little light on how students actually experience examinations. The awareness of this situation constitutes a strong rationale for conducting research that explores the experiential dimensions of educational examinations in order to better understand the students' experiences of examinations.

1.6 The Structure of the dissertation

This thesis is organized in the following manner: Chapter 1 introduces the research questions and the background to the study. Chapter 2 provides a sketch of the background to the tradition of examinations in China. Chapter 3 presents the philosophical foundation on which the present research is based: phenomenological human science and existential philosophy. The intent here is to explicate some of the major features of this tradition and discuss certain implications of this tradition for education. Chapter 4 offers the Chinese students' lived experience descriptions of examinations that have been collected from selected schools in China. Chapter 5 discusses the themes that emerged from reflecting upon these experiences. Chapter 6 focuses on more in-depth questions which relate to the students' examination experiences. And chapter 7 develops the cross-cultural dialogue between East and West.

Chapter 2 Sketching the Background

China has long maintained a unique educational system that is strongly test-driven. The strong tradition of competitive examinations has a history of more than four thousand years (DuBois, 1970; Popham, 1990; Martin, 1881). The examination system originated in ancient China; it has been used, not only in educational circles, but also in other sectors such as civil services. It is sometimes called, by some scholars, the "fifth great invention" of China. In fact, the development of education in China is closely related to the evolution of the examination system. And the examination system has had a profound impact on the social life of the Chinese people.

China's examination system has also influenced many other countries. For example, the Japanese examination system to select officials was introduced from China in about 701 A.D. (Hidano, 1988). During the sixteenth century, as European contacts with China developed, the examination system was admired by some Western scholars, including Voltaire, who advocated such a system for France. Early in the nineteenth century the newly established British civil service examination system was influenced by diplomats and missionaries familiar with the Chinese examination system. Noting the successful experience of the British Civil Service Commission that was established in the 1850s, several U.S. legislators attempted to create comparable testing operations in the United States in the 1860s. Bills to establish such a system were introduced and finally the civil service examination system was established in the States in 1883 (Popham, 1990).

W.A.P Martin, an American missionary in China at that time and later the president of Tungwen College in Peking (now Beijing University), produced a series of research articles about the Chinese imperial examinations that he submitted to the U.S Ministry of Education. He wrote,

> *England, France, and Prussia have each made use of competitive examinations in some branches of their public service. But in these countries the experiment is of recent date and of limited application. We must look further East if we would see the system working on a scale sufficiently large and through a period sufficiently extended to afford us a full exhibition of its advantages and defects…*
>
> (Martin, 1881, p. 39)

In his long report to Hon. J. Eaton (Commissioner of Education, Washington, D.C.), he further commented,

> *It is in China that its merits have been tested in the most satisfactory manner; and if in this instance we should profit by their experience, it would not be the first lesson we have learned from the Chinese, nor the last they are capable of giving us…."*

(Martin, 1881, p. 39)

To understand its profound influence on all aspects of Chinese life and society as well as in Asian countries, we need to look back upon the historical context.

2.1 Historical context of examinations in China

The Chinese examination system can be traced back for about four thousand years. It has been recorded that Da-Shun, the sage emperor of remote antiquity, who lived around 2200 B.C., tested his officers every three years, and after these examinations he either granted them promotion or dismissed them from the service (Wang, 1982; Popham, 1990; Dubois, 1970). It is not known on what subjects he examined them at that time when characters were but newly invented and when books did not yet exist. It is not known whether he gave candidates tests previous to appointment; yet the mere fact of such an early periodical examination established a precedent of imperial competitive examination that became officially instituted in 165 B.C. and since then, continued to be observed and developed, gradually, with some breaks, but steadily, to the end of Tsing dynasty, the last feudal dynasty in China.

More than a thousand years after the commencement of the Chow dynasty around 1115 B.C., the government was already accustomed to examining candidates as well as officers. The Chinese had become a cultivated people, and all candidates for office were required to give proof of their knowledge of the "six arts"—rites (rituals, rules and ceremonies of public and social life), music (ceremonial music and ritual dances), archery, horsemanship, history, and mathematics. These six arts expressed in the six concise Chinese characters (*li, yue, she, yu, shi, su*) constituted the sum total of a liberal education during the Chow dynasty period. Governments ran and controlled the schools. Government officials and teachers were actually the same people.

As far back as 840 B.C., when the West Zhou Dynasty had just been founded, the ruling classes, pressed by administrative needs to consolidate power, established the *gongshi* system—a system of selection and promotion from the level of *xiangxue* (schools on the county level) through *guoxue* (schools on the prefecture or province level) to the level of *taixue* (the level of national university). The enrollment examinations included moral conduct and military feats. The enrollees were predominantly princes and the eldest sons of warlords and senior officials with the exception of a few rare talented plebeians.

With the crumbling of the slave system and the establishment of various feudal kingdoms, the seventh century B.C. (that is, the Spring and Autumn Period) witnessed the emergence of the system of retaining literati. To expand their sphere of influence, these feudal kingdoms endeavored to attract literati and encouraged the running of private schools. Some kings and private school teachers had thousands of students. For instance, Confucius (551-479 B.C.), the famous educator and philosopher of the Lu Kingdom, was reputed to have three thousand students. At this period, the curriculum for study and exams was gradually formed, though in a very early form.

Under the dynasty of Han, after the elapse of about another thousand years, we find the range of subjects for the civil-service examinations largely extended. Confucius' (551-479 B.C.) philosophy of education began to exert great influence on the education of people about two hundred years after his death. Confucian Ethics had become current, and a moral standard was emphasized and regarded in the selection of the competitors by the local government. Those students, whose moral character had been sufficiently attested, were then subjected to trial in respect to their intellectual qualifications. The trial was two-fold: first, as to their skill in the "six arts" already mentioned (in terms of the Five classics and Four books); and second, as to their familiarity with one or more of the following subjects: the civil law, military affairs, agriculture, the administration of the revenue, and the geography of the Empire with special reference to the water communications. This was an immense advancement on the meager requirements of the more ancient dynasties.

Passing over another thousand years or so, we come to the era of the Tang and Sung dynasties, when the standard of literary attainment was greatly elevated. Based on the former competitive examination, more books of the sages on various subjects were added. Composition of essays, prose and poems became one part of the examinations. The government arranged graduates in three classes (*xiu-cai, ju-ren and jin-shi,* basically equivalent to the Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees in the West)—a classification that was retained with some slight modifications until the end of the feudal dynasty period at the turn of the twentieth century.

The imperial competitive examination system grew into a colossal apparatus under the Ming and Tsing dynasties. The examination system had been developed to its peak. It still exhibited the features that were prominent in its earlier stages—the "six arts," the "five studies," and the "three degrees." Of course, many more books were required to be read in preparation for the examinations. And paintings and calligraphy art were also favorable skills for the graduates.

Although the examination system was not static over the long course of its existence, of course, it is nevertheless possible to present a general overview of how it operated, especially under the Ming and Tsing periods of Chinese history. Basically, the examination system consisted of tests at three distinct levels: the district examinations, the provincial examinations, and the metropolitan examinations. The examinations were of increasing difficulty, and each required the candidate to have passed the preceding level (see Fig. 2.1).

Stage I: Preliminary Examinations	**Stage II: Provincial Examinations**	**Stage III: Metropolitan Examinations**
District-level *(xian-Kao)* Prefectural-level *(fu-Kao)* Examination for *sheng-yuan* degree	Examination for *chu-jen* degree	Major examination (known as *Hui-Shi)* for *chin-shi* degree ; Palace examination *(tien-shi)*

Fig 2.1.

The first examination level, which was conducted in local cities by provincial education officials, granted successful examinees the title *hsiu-ts'ai* (Flowering Talent). Passing this first examination allowed one to wear special, distinctive clothing, as well as granted one's family a tax exemption but, more importantly, it allowed one to progress to the next level of the examination system.

The second level of the examination system consisted of a test given every 3 years in the various provincial capitals of the empire. The examination took place in a special complex, consisting of individual cells in which the candidates spent 9 days writing their answers to the set questions. The cells contained only three boards to function as a shelf, desk and chair, and were too small to allow the individual to comfortably sleep at night (see photo 2.1. 2.2,. 2.3. 2.4). Successful candidates, who were generally a tiny fraction of those taking the examination, gained the title *chu-jen* (Recommended Man), and were now eligible for lower-level government appointments.

Photo 2.2.

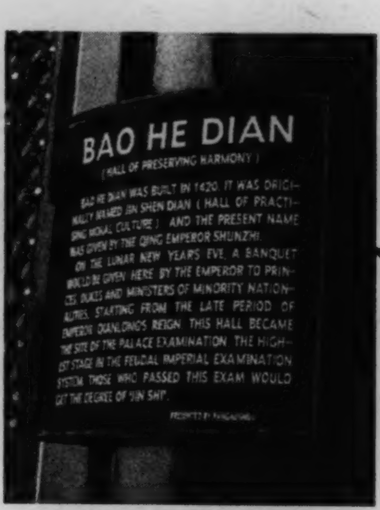
The Ancient Imperial Examination Site in Nanjing

Photo 2.3. The Ancient Imperial Examination Cell Compound in Nanjing

Photo 2.4. The Ancient Imperial Examination Single Cell in Nanjing

Next, metropolitan examinations were held in order to identify those scholars who would be suitable for higher posts in the government. Only 1 of 20 or 30 candidates at this level could hope to become a *chin-shih* (Presented Scholar). Finally, also at the metropolitan level, came the pinnacle of the examination system, the palace examination, which was presided over by the Emperor himself. At this final level, candidates did not fail but, rather, were ranked in order of merit.

The examinations were open to most men in Chinese society. Furthermore, there was no restriction on the number of times an individual might try to pass an examination, and so some men spent their entire lives attempting to pass the difficult examinations.


BAO HE DIAN
(HALL OF PRESERVING HARMONY)
BAO HE DIAN WAS BUILT IN 1420. IT WAS ORIGI-
NALLY NAMED JIN SHEN DIAN (HALL OF PRACTI-
SING MORAL CULTURE) AND THE PRESENT NAME
WAS GIVEN BY THE QING EMPEROR SHUNZHI.
ON THE LUNAR NEW YEARS EVE, A BANQUET
WOULD BE GIVEN HERE BY THE EMPEROR TO PRIN-
CES, DUKES AND MINISTERS OF MINORITY NATION-
ALITIES. STARTING FROM THE LATE PERIOD OF
EMPEROR QIANLONG'S REIGN, THIS HALL BECAME
THE SITE OF THE PALACE EXAMINATION, THE HIGH-
EST STAGE IN THE FEUDAL IMPERIAL EXAMINATION
SYSTEM. THOSE WHO PASSED THIS EXAM WOULD
GET THE DEGREE OF 'JIN SHI'.

Under the late Tsing dynasty, after the invasion of Western countries and after China's defeat in the Opium Wars, the tottering Tsing government of the time realized (under the pressure of the education reformists) that the education of natural science and foreign language was very important and added them to the curricula for the imperial examination system. Subsequently, a series of even more radical educational reforms were conducted. The imperial examination system was finally abolished in 1905 and the traditional academies in various parts of the country were changed into modern government run schools. However, upon completion of their school studies, students still receive such scholastic titles as *Ju-ren* or *jin-shi*—as if they had passed the traditional civil service examination.

Besides the government-run education system, there were also established under the influence of the West, an increasing number of missionary schools run by churches, where Christianity, Western literature, foreign languages and natural sciences were taught.

After the feudal dynasty system was completely overthrown by the bourgeois revolution known as the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, the bourgeois democrats made significant changes to the educational system of the late Tsing dynasty. However, owing to wars and political chaos during the period when China was ruled by the Beiyang Warlords (1912-1927), none of the reforms was thoroughly carried out. Because of this, the education in this period was rather laissez-faire, and no nationwide examinations were conducted.

During the more than 20 years (1921-1949) under the KMT (Kuomingtang) rule, a new education system was gradually established. Following the strong influence and control of the United States, KMT's government imitated the US pattern of education: 6 years of primary school, 6 years of secondary education (3 years each in a junior high and senior high school), and 4-6 years in higher education. Curriculum was basically a copy of the American curriculum. This period was not stable at all, especially because of the Japanese invasion (1937-1945) and the Civil War between KMT and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). Accordingly, during the KMT ruling period, the education system was not stable either. During this period, three types of schools existed: those run by KMT government, and those private schools either run by individuals or by Western Christianity. People generally did not need to pass examinations to be enrolled in a school, but they had to pay for their education.

In 1917 the Ministry of Education of the KMT Government stipulated that all students of normal universities and colleges must pass an entrance examination. In 1938 the Ministry of Education announced that from then on standard or universal enrollments would be held in all normal universities and colleges and those issues as the subjects of examination, the assignment of questions, and the standards of acceptance were to be under the charge of a unified enrollment committee. According to the announcement, both written and oral examinations would be administered. However, this system of standard entrance examinations was never put into practice because of the War of Resistance against Japan. In 1947 China had 125 universities and colleges with only 150,000 students. All these schools had their own system of entrance examinations.

In 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded. Subsequent changes of educational policies and practices have been carried out within a dual framework: on the one hand, there has been a continual reassessment of China's own philosophical tradition, and, on the other hand, there has been a selective experimentation with foreign institutions. To meet the needs of the planned economic construction and to fulfill the planned university enrollment quota, a national higher institute enrollment committee was set up in 1952.

This brought about the unification of higher school enrollment throughout the country, including the standardization of examination questions, requirements for application, examination subjects, general principles, policies, and concrete measures of enrollment. A working committee of higher school enrollment was subsequently established in each of the provinces, cities, and autonomous regions. After the ten-year's interruption of the Cultural Revolution, the nationwide college entrance examinations were restored in 1978, when China had its Open Door Policy and the economic reform was initiated. The national postgraduate entrance examination system was implemented three years later. Meanwhile, the province-wide examination system for secondary education graduation has also begun.

The 1980s' economic reform brought about reform in the education sector, particularly basic education. Just as economic reform initially allowed planned and market price systems, basic education changes embraced dual track schooling systems in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The concept of "key schools" was introduced and developed in each province, prefecture, county, township, or even village to admit the better-performing students and highly qualified teachers in each respective jurisdiction. In the basic education reform in the middle 1980s, both key and regular schooling systems were expanded greatly (Lewin, et al., 1994), but emphasis was placed on the former. Financial, physical, and human resources that were supposed to otherwise be distributed equitably for all schools and students were concentrated on key schools. In a regular school that did not boast a key status, key/fast classes were developed for better-performing students through utilizing the school's concentrated resources.

In essence, the dual-track schooling system is a bifurcated educational system with a small sector of key schools for the elite and a large sector of regular schools for the masses (Rosen, 1985, 1987). This educational differentiation is ubiquitous in the Chinese educational hierarchy from kindergartens to universities.

In the 1990s, the college enrollment rate was steadily rising (Wang, 2000). Since the second half of 1990s, the exam-oriented schooling associated with the dual track system was considered too counterproductive to reform objectives, particularly to the countrywide implementation of 9-year free compulsory schooling. The central educational authorities decided to de-emphasize the elite track. Education policy makers explicitly required that all primary and secondary schools should admit students in their neighborhoods and communities. In 1996, Li Lanqing, Vice Premier in charge of education, declared: "We must, from now on, no longer promote key middle schools or continue contributing all of our human, physical, and financial resources and all of our subsidies and donations into such schools" (Li, 1997). Merging the educational dual tracks, however, turned out to be a far more difficult and lengthy enterprise for a variety of political, socioeconomic, and educational reasons. The reintegration of the two tracks has yet to be completed.

In recent years, the examination system has received much serious criticism from various groups of society. Some people argue that this system has created not only a group of very hard working students skillful in rote memorization, but also a group of students with high marks but low abilities. The national curriculum itself has become the focus of the criticism. Some education critics call it "examination-oriented education" and hope that drastic changes will be conducted to the system and Western education style be introduced. The debate is still ongoing.

2.2 Recent educational reform in China

In order to understand the current debate and professional practice conflicts in China education circle, it is necessary to look at some of the recent developments and educational change in educational assessment practice, especially in examination system in China. I will do this in terms of a brief discussion of government documents as issued by the Ministry of Education of China.

On February 26, 1993, the State Council issued *"the Outline of China Education Reform and Development"* in which the idea of changing the test driven education to quality education has been officially put forward and in Article 31, it states that

> *efforts should be taken to change and improve gradually the examination system, gradually and steadily implementing the policy of entering the closest junior high school nearby when graduating from elementary school, junior high school graduates taking admission exams for senior high schools and high school graduates taking the graduating examinations and university entrance examinations.*
>
> (State document, 1993)

This important government document recognizes that the education in general is test-driven and needs to be changed urgently.

On June 18, 1999, the State Council of the Chinese Central Government issued a benchmarking document entitled *"Decision to Further Education Reform and Promote the Quality Education"*, realizing that the present situation of exam-driven education system had revealed so many defects. In this important document, it stated that

> *The present educational work needs to promote concept change, paradigm change. Heuristic and discursive teaching methods should be*

encouraged to stimulate student's independent and creative thinking"

(State document, 1999)

It was also in this document that idea of changing the present examination and assessment system was put forward (For a full text of the document, please see Appendix VI).

On June 7, 2001, the Ministry of Education issued the document on *"the Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform."* This was another important government document on educational reform in China. It provided the guidelines for the curriculum reform in all aspects which included the curriculum reform specific goals, curriculum structure, curriculum criteria, teaching and learning process, teaching material development and management, curriculum evaluation and management, teacher professional development, curriculum reform arrangements and implementation. It also provided very important guidelines for the assessment in basic education (articles 14 and 15). (For a full text of the document, please see Appendix VI).

On December 27, 2002, the China Ministry of Education issued the historical government document on *"Actively Promoting and Pushing Forward the Reform on the Assessment and Examination System in Elementary and Secondary Schools."* This signified that China was then officially launching the nationwide reform on the assessment and examination system in elementary and secondary schools. This significant government document provided comprehensive and general guidelines for changing the present assessment and test system in eight articles (For a full text of the document, please also see Appendix VI). In this historical document, it stated clearly that the primary school students' performance should be only counted in levels instead of actual marks. Ranking students and publicizing the rankings should not be allowed. It was also in this document that states "any ranking of districts, schools and students regarding the uniformed junior high graduate exams by any institutes should not be allowed."

These series of government documents issued one after another are actually a continuing effort to improve the test oriented educational system in China. The language used in these documents is encouraging and inspiring. Some reforms in local levels have also been seen recently. For example, Shanghai City announces that it no longer displays the ranking publicly. But reform is reform. Reform is usually carried out on a macro-scale and most of them are produced for propaganda purpose. When implementing, policy makers, teachers and school administrators still have little knowledge about how students are actually experiencing their everyday test driven classrooms.

The exam-oriented system is deeply embedded into the Chinese culture and change will be expected to come very slowly. The actual practice in school is still contradictory.

2.3 Confucius' influence and shaping of the education system in China

From the previous historical sketch, it can be seen that Chinese education is profoundly intertwined with the tradition of exams. Built around the complicated examination system, is the highly structured education system controlled by the central government.

It is important to note that the Chinese examination-driven system is closely related to the Chinese education philosophy and the eastern epistemology of learning. It would be impossible to discuss traditional Chinese educational thought without repeated reference to Confucian thought; indeed, to a considerable extent one could argue that traditional Chinese educational thought in large part is Confucian educational thought. Some scholars argued that "Confucianism is still an integral part of the 'psycho-cultural construct' of the contemporary Chinese intellectual as well as the Chinese ordinary people" (Tu, 1994, p.134). Confucianism remains a defining characteristic of the Chinese mentality. And, in a similar vein, Cheng Tien-Hsi comments, "The whole Chinese social system, or rather what may be called Chinese civilization and culture ... is saturated with the teachings of Confucius and those of Mencius, the sage next to him and the most brilliant exponent of his doctrines" (Cheng, 2000, p14).

Confucius and his followers advocated the necessity of a hierarchy of men (Ho, 1962, p. 3). In the meantime he also sought means to solve the inherent injustice that such a hierarchy could create. Confucius' solution was to choose rulers based on principles of merit. He believed that if the government were composed of wise and virtuous men, social harmony would prevail (Ho, 1962, p. 5). This philosophy of Confucius is perhaps best shown in the following paragraph from the *Analects*:

> *If the people are governed by law and controlled by punishment, they will try to keep out of jail and have no sense of shame. If the people are led by virtue and regulated by the rules of propriety, they will have a sense of honor and moreover will become good.*
>
> (Analects, Huang, trans. 1997, p. 63)

In order to make virtue and education rather than wealth or inherited status the real basis for choosing leaders, Confucius advocated educational opportunity for all without regard to social class, and he offered instruction to his disciples irrespective of their social background (Ho, 1962, p. 6). His ideal was thus a hierarchical society in which all people had an opportunity for education, with those demonstrating their excellence in study and virtue and moral integrity occupying the top level of the hierarchy. The examination system was an attempt to recruit men on the basis of merit rather than on the basis of family or political connection. Because success in the examination system was the basis of social status and because education was the key to success in the system, education and academic achievement was highly regarded in traditional China.

The significance of education stands out conspicuously in the Confucian tradition. This is because for Confucianism an individual's moral development and perfection, which is regarded as the basis of an ideal society, can only be achieved through education. *The Three Character Classics* begins with an emphasis on the function of education:

> *To feed the body, not the mind—fathers, on you the blame!*
> *Instruction without severity, the idle teacher's shame.*
> *If a child does not learn, this is not as it should be.*
> *How, with a youth of idleness, can age escape the blight?*
>
> (Giles, 1972, p. 26)

During the latter years of the Tang Dynasty, Han Yu, a Confucian philosopher, stated the view that structured education could make the wise person wiser and assist in reducing crime, for only the unwise desire the life of criminality. He greatly emphasized the value of the educational experience as a purifier of the soul and spirit. The Confucian influence is far and wide. Just as has been observed by some scholars, countries with a Confucian tradition such as Japan and Korea have all manifested a widespread belief that education is of paramount importance in one's life.

The Chinese love learning because they commonly believe that learning can be a spiritual enjoyment (Lee, 2000). That is, learning has an intrinsic value like that of music or art and it can purify the soul and cultivate the character by displaying a world where one is away from the madding crowds and enters the great spiritual palace of peace and harmony. In Chinese, learning is called "xue-wen". Literally, it means "learning by questioning." It also means "learning is questioning." In the eye of the great Confucian scholar Han Yu of Song Dynasty, "xue gui zhi yi" means "learning values questioning." Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism all recognize the personal spiritual satisfaction that flows from the enlightenment and transcendence as a result of learning.

It is especially true to the Chinese that education can mean social and economic mobility. Education promises to pay immensely. The following famous sayings, about the importance of education, have been cited frequently in China and have expressed a shared sense of values through the ages:

> *To enrich your family, no need to buy good land:*
> *Books hold a thousand measures of grain.*
> *For any easy life, no need to build a mansion:*
> *In books are found houses of gold.*
> *Going out, be not vexed at absence of followers:*

> *In books carriages and horses form a crowd.*
>
> *Marrying, be not vexed by the lack of a good go-between:*
>
> *In books there are girls with faces of jade.*
>
> *A boy who wants to become a somebody*
>
> *Devotes himself to the classics, faces the window, and reads.*
>
> (Miyazaki, 1963, p.17)

In recent decades education has become valued even higher than before in China, not only because of the aforementioned sayings but also because it seems to have become a prerequisite for good employment, hence, the means of making a living.

In closing this chapter, it appears obvious that Confucian philosophy has deeply shaped Chinese education. It has given education an all-pervasive role; indeed, it has provided the foundation on which rests the entire political, social, economic, and the cultural life of the Chinese people. Perhaps this may also explain why the periodic examinations both in ancient and present times have been great public events. The paramount importance placed by Confucian philosophy on education has fostered a unique culture of examination and has converted educational practices into a totalizing testing way of life. In short, the examination culture has been woven into the social fabric of the Chinese people's everyday life.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Phenomenological inquiry: orienting ourselves to the life world

The main approach for this study is supported by a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology as explicated by van Manen (1990; 1997), Giorgi (1985), and others. Phenomenology orients the researcher to the lived experiential dimensions of everyday life. With respect to tests and exams, it asks how young people experience exams and tests rather than what they think of them or what opinions they have of them. Hermeneutics emphasizes the interpretive dimension of phenomenological inquiry into the pre-reflective aspects of experience. Since pre-reflective or lived experience is prior to our thinking and prior to putting into language, the ultimate nature of any lived moment is always beyond our grasp. However, through lived experience accounts or anecdotes we can gain some sense of the pre-reflective quality of human experience—in this case the examination experience.

Pedagogy is the third methodologically significant concept in this study. Pedagogy can be seen as a discipline in its own right. It asks the ethical question of how we should live with children and how we should deal with them in particular and practical circumstances. At the more theoretical level pedagogy asks what is in children's best interest and it asks the methodological question how we can understand how children actually experience the (exam) situations in which we as parents and teachers place them. So pedagogy requires both a "phenomenological sensitivity to lived experiences (children's realities and lifeworlds)" (van Manen, 1997, p. 2) and "a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see the pedagogical significance of situations and relations of living with children" (van Manen, 1997, p. 2).

3.1.1 Phenomenology as human science

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy, owing its origin to the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and the philosophers after such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, who took the ideas into existentialism. The aim of phenomenology is to study how human phenomena are experienced in consciousness, in cognitive and perceptual acts, as well as how they may be valued or appreciated. In other words, it is the study of human lived experience, a human science and a philosophy that intends to explore the meanings of experience by constantly placing in abeyance the assumptions and pre-knowledge that we have of our experiences. It is the study of the life-world, too – the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it (Husserl, 1970). Merleau-Ponty describes that "the world is as not what I think, but what I lived through" (1989, p. vii). According to van Manen (1990) phenomenological inquiry is an exploration of the meaning of lived experience. It seeks to study and understand human existence from the pre-reflective moment of the temporal now. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty says that phenomenology aims to reawaken our basic experience of the world as we live it, to "re-achieve a direct and primitive contact with the world" – before we abstract, conceptualize, or theorize it (Merleau-Ponty, 1989, p. vii). In short, phenomenology aims at gaining a reflective understanding of the pre-reflective dimensions of our everyday experiences.

3.1.2 Phenomenology as a research methodology

In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in turning to phenomenology as an approach to understand human experience in a great variety of professional domains: education, health science, nursing, psychology, and pedagogy. Phenomenological research in nursing, geriatric care, clinical psychology, preventative health care, counseling, pedagogy, and human ecology is increasingly pursued by a breed of scholars who tend to hold strong backgrounds in their own disciplines, but who possess less grounding in philosophical thought, yet who are "doing phenomenology" (van Manen, 2001, p. 457).

Phenomenology, as a human science, is less interested in the various philosophical debate and arguments about technical philosophical questions, than in applying it to explore the experiential world of human beings in order to gain a reflective understanding of the lifeworld. In this sense, phenomenological practitioners make use of whatever material is available to help understand the experiential dimensions of their professional domains. The present study of Chinese student's examination experiences is a research endeavor using the hermeneutic phenomenological method to explore the experiential lifeworld of student exam and test events with an interest in their pedagogical implications and significance.

3.1.3 Anecdotes and stories from the life-world

One way to try to explore the experiential dimensions of everyday life is to ask for simple accounts of people's experiences. The aim here is to have students and adults tell an exam experience without giving judgments or opinions about it. Of course, it is hard to draw the line of telling versus explaining but experiential accounts approximate better sense of life as experience. This study uses accounts through anecdotes and stories shared by the participants. Anecdote is a lived experiential description (LED) of a particular situation that has a certain narrative form (van Manen, 1989). Van Manen describes the nature and the structure of anecdote in the following seven points:

(1) An anecdote is a very short and simple story

(2) An anecdote describes one incident or experience

(3) An anecdote begins close to the central idea

(4) An anecdote includes important concrete detail

(5) An anecdote often contains talk & quotes

(6) An anecdote closes quickly after the climax

(7) An anecdote often closes with some "point"

One may ask, what is the philosophical and theoretical basis for the soundness and validity of using anecdotal experiential descriptions? According to van Manen, an anecdote particularizes the abstracting tendency of theoretical discourse: It makes it possible to involve us pre-reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while paradoxically inviting us into a reflective stance vis-à-vis the meanings embedded in the experience. The important feature of anecdotal as well as hermeneutic phenomenological discourse is that it simultaneously pulls us in, and then prompts us to reflect (van Manen, 1989, pp. 247-248). Anecdotes find their power in the concreteness of what is told which, in turn, invites both writers and readers to reflect in a concrete way. Thus, the power of anecdotes does not lie only in their concreteness, they encourage us to reflect.

Anecdote also has special strength as a form of researching. Van Manen says that "anecdotal narrative allows the person to reflect in a concrete way on experience and thus appropriate that experience. "To anecdote is to reflect, to think" (1989, p. 232). What is suggested here is that the concreteness of stories is not only for persons told in stories but also for those who tell, and those who read, stories. This characteristic makes the experiential form of anecdotal writing particularly relevant to the present study as a pedagogical inquiry into the life worlds of students' examination experience. Anecdotes are presented in chapter 4, interpreted in chapter 5, and reflected on further in chapter 6—they are interwoven throughout this dissertation. They are derived mainly from students, some from adults including teachers and parents. They serve to ground and explicate my understanding of what the examination experience has come to mean.

In order to describe what is required of teachers in the way of an epistemology of practice, I have used the notions of pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact to wonder about what is required of teachers in their everyday life actions with students. Pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness is a type of embodied knowledge that is sensitive to the student's experience. It is a very important part of phenomenological pedagogy in its concern with the particular child and the unique experience of the student and teacher. It is a term used by van Manen (1990, 1991a) and refers to a way of being and working with children that describes the epistemology of actual practice in a phenomenological manner. It entails empathic responsiveness to the child's situation, needs and thoughtful action in attempting to do what is good for the child. Pedagogical tact is also needed in dealing with students in test and exam and its related moments. It can be nurtured through the constant reflective practice on the student's experiential sources.

3.2 Collecting data (lived experience descriptions - LEDs)

The "data" of human science research is human experience (van Manen, 1997, p. 63). The research data in the present dissertation includes the lived experience descriptions (LEDs) such as the anecdotes, experiential stories and interview transcripts collected from students, teachers and parents.

During the summer of 2002, I spent about two months from late May to the middle of July in selected high schools in three cities of China (Nanjing, Beijing, and Zixing). From July 14 to July 31 of 2003, I paid a second visit to the selected schools in the three cities in order to collect more data from the students and teachers in these schools. Late May, June and early July are the examination season all over China. Starting in the middle of May, the various simulation entrance and graduation examinations are being conducted. In the middle of June, the various provincial graduation and entrance examinations for junior high schools and senior high schools are held. In July 7th, 8th and 9th (in some provinces July 10th is added, for a total of four days). Starting from year 2003, these nationwide uniform entrance examinations for universities commenced about one month earlier, in the middle of June, in order to avoid the intense summer heat. In 2004 and 2005, I paid a third and then fourth visit to the selected schools and to other places in China. During my stay in China, I put myself in the intense examination environment (in a school setting and in other social settings including the everyday life of school communities, government conferences, news media, etc.). I had the opportunity to observe classrooms, interview parents, teachers, and administrators and most importantly, with students.

Altogether I have collected around 500 pieces of student writings, 159 teacher writings, 23 teacher interviews and 17 student interviews. This does not include the informal conversations that I had with numerous students, teachers, parents and school administrators. At the same time, I also had the chance of reading a number of student writings and stories about examination events from various literature sources that are not available in Northern America.

3.2.1 Selecting schools in China for the research

My research is confined mainly to students ranging from Grade 7-12. Altogether, five public schools in the three cities are selected to collect data. These schools are (the real names of the schools have been replaced with fictional names to protect their anonymity):

1. Zixing High School. This school includes both junior high and senior high programs. Location: Zixing city, Hunan Province, P.R. China. The school is

recognized as one of the best provincial high schools. This school is in my hometown, Zixing, a small mountainous city in the south part of China.

2. Nanjing Star High School. This school runs both junior high and senior high school programs. Location: Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, P.R. China. The school is recognized as one of the best national high schools.

3. Panyan Junior High School. This is an ordinary countryside school. Location: Pancheng town, Nanjing city, Jiangsu Province, P.R. China. The junior high is a village school.

4. Nanjing Zhongshan School. The school runs programs from elementary to senior high school. Location: Nanjing city, Jiangsu Province, P. R, China. The school is recognized as one of the best national high schools.

5. Beijing East High School. The school runs both junior high and senior high programs. Location: Beijing city, P.R. China.

No special criteria were set in choosing the schools. The phenomenological inquiry is to present possible lived experiences, make interpretation of them and try to understand the pedagogical implications. It does not generalize to defined populations. Obviously, experiences of different variety helps to understand more comprehensively the range of possible experiences that students may have around exams and tests. The schools were selected mainly because I have maintained a good relation with them, even after I came to Canada in 1998. They are in different provinces of China and represent somehow schools of different kinds such as urban, countryside, prestigious and ordinary school as they are "ranked". Some schools are considered among the best provincial or national high schools because they have been evaluated and ranked to that relevant level in terms that they are able to attract the top students from elementary and junior high school graduates and because the schools' portion of students that passed the entrance examinations of universities and the number of students that enter the key universities are very high. However, it does not necessary mean this becomes one of the criteria to be selected for the data collecting purpose. Since I could not stay for a longer period to collect data every time I was in China, sometimes, I had to make best use of my time there. Some of my former colleagues and friends helped me a lot in obtaining these data while I was absent.

3.2.2 Designing the interview questions and guidelines for writing anecdotes

Phenomenological, experience-oriented questions are carefully designed and conversational interviews are conducted to get the participants to re-tell their experiences in a pre-reflective and pre-theoretic manner. (See the sample questions designed and the workshop materials in the appendices.) The participants can be put into three categories: students of junior high schools, students of senior high schools, and teachers/parents. In some cases, a small workshop on how to write experiential accounts was conducted to familiarize the participants with the features of experiential writing. Students and teachers selected from the schools and some parents participated in the research discussion and in the experiential anecdote writing process.

With respect to teachers, questions were asked to let them recall what exam and assessment experiences are like for their students and make a short reflective paragraph. To students, similar questions have been asked. Both teachers and students were invited to describe a concrete situation/story that stood out in their memory most clearly from their own childhood, and from their contemporary experiences both in a written form and in individual recorded interviews. In some cases, the interview transcriptions and writings are phenomenologically edited/modified (for example, assumption phrases such as "I think, In my opinion, ..." have been removed/reworded and then returned to the participants for review until these written down stories/memory/anecdotes were experientially most recognizable and reveal most approximately their lived experiences without too much judgment or opining.

Sometimes, an after-interview discussion was conducted and some of the participants and non-participants were invited in a dialogue to reflect upon these lived experience descriptions. Participants were sometimes shy, timid to speak out at first, but later on as the sharing progressed, the responses and talks were very active. I found the participants' contributions in the shared reflections most helpful and their insights and reflections are also collected and are indicated in this dissertation.

3.2.3 Phenomenological Interviews

Open-ended conversational interviews were conducted with 40 students from the various schools; some were not from the selected schools and were conducted simply because I had seized the chance in some occasions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and returned to the interviewees again for further changes so as to get closer to the lived experiences as they remembered them. These transcripts of interviews were reviewed and authenticated by the participants. Translation from Chinese into English has been rendered. This consists of a very challenging and time-consuming part of the research. When the anecdotes obtained from these students and adults were used, their real names are substituted with fictional names to protect their anonymity. Their school names were also hidden for ethical reasons. Consent Forms were signed before such interviews and anecdotal writings were started. (See appendix: Research Consent Form)

In some cases, by obtaining the permission, I also made use of some stories and writings that I found in published student classroom writing collections. In Mainland China, there are many student texts available in bookstores. These are often good writings of different genres collected from classroom teaching and writing exercises. I have selected several stories from these sources after the appropriate authority had given permission.

Chapter 4 Student's Lived Experience of Examinations

This chapter provides the main experiential materials collected and used for this study. By offering a view of these experiential descriptions it is hoped that the reader gains a sense of the interpretive possibilities of the examination and text experiences of students.

It is important, however, that these experiential accounts are read with an open mind. Even when the reader has hardly finished reading the first story, the reader may think, "Well, that is how it is in life. Some students are better at things than other students and you would better accept that fact." Indeed this was precisely what some Canadian and Chinese teachers have told me. Why study how students experience tests and examinations? There is nothing to be gained from such study. We have to accept that some children do better at school (tests and examinations) than other children.

But in these comments is already contained a pedagogical view: that educating children must be done through tests and examinations and that in the end this is good for children. By letting children tell through concrete and specific examples what they experience when they take tests and examinations we may gain a sense of the phenomenological structures of these experiences and be in a better position to consider the pedagogical "goodness" of such educational practices for the present and future lives of our young people.

I am a low grade student

I am working on math problems with all other boarding school classmates during the second evening study hour. I work hard on it for quite a while, but I still cannot get the right answer. Now, I look at Zhang, the "Genius" in my class, so I tiptoe over to him. He patiently explains the solution to me. Hey, I am so stupid; I still do not understand it. He explains it to me from the very beginning again. But I still do not get it. Finally, Zhang simply writes down the process for me. I really feel guilty bothering him further, so I tear off the page, planning to think further about the solution back in my own seat.

I am just sitting down when the teacher-in-charge comes in. He reprimands me sternly, "What are you doing?! Walking here and there and disturbing your classmates?! If you don't want to study, then get out of the classroom!"

I feel numb for quite a while afterwards. Looking at his cruel face, I want to go home; I do not want to study further. However, giving a second thought to my future and my ambition, I finally accept it.

I am a "low-grade" student, a real, authentic low-grade student. I am the staircase for high-grade students; I am the scapegoat for good students to excuse themselves for decreasing grades, the laughing stock for my *classmates, the nail in teachers' eyes, the worries of my parents' heart… All of these miseries are mine only because I did badly in examinations.*

(Xiaoqiang Li, grade 11)

An unworthy nobody

I walk into class—late. The lesson has begun. But before I can explain why I am late the teacher turns to me angrily. He scolds me and tells me that I am no good and should not bother to come at all if I cannot be on time. I meekly sit down. Some of the students laugh at me. They do not feel compassion. I have a hard time concentrating on the lesson as I am still hurting from the teacher's cruel words. Then the door opens and another student walks in. It is Hao Lee. He is one of the top students in our class. But instead of scolding him for being late, the teacher tells Hao to open his book on the page where we are reading. Now I feel even more hurt. The teacher treats Hao with kindness and respect while he regards me as an unworthy nobody.

When a good student asks the teacher whether a math problem has a simpler solution, the teacher praises him for his deep questioning. But the same math problem, the same question from a low grade student, and the same teacher comments with a mocking tone, "you are splitting hairs; don't expect to walk up to the sky with one step!" When a high grade student wins a race in a sports meet, the teacher praises him for his intelligence, morality and physicality; whereas when the same race is won by a low grader, the teacher *says you "only know how to play, but don't know how to focus your energy on your study." When high grade and lower-grade students make the same mistakes, the teacher reprimands the lower-grade students first, until she or he makes the student's face turn red or makes him or her cry. Teachers are more generous to the high-grade, like Hao. If he is late for school, the teacher says with a light comment, "Come early next time, Hao". But if I, a lower-grade student, come late, the teacher will not listen though I may have a good excuse. He won't even mention my name. He will not listen; the punishment may be to stand outside the classroom for the whole period.*

Too big difference, too much frustration! Why is it me who always has to clean the classroom? Why does the teacher always let out his anger to me? Why it is me that is always laughed at by others? Why is it me that always must stand outside the classroom? I am a low-grade student. I have had enough bad treatment: the last two rows are always filled with fellows like me. I also want to remove my name from the black name list. But every effort I make is devastated by a cruel response. Then I despair and want to give up. In the student world, I am a true "proletarian".

Who does not want to be smart? Who does not want to be famous? Who does not want to enter Qinghua and Beida? I am a low grade, but I also have my ambition. I also have some shining spots of my own. Teachers, parents, classmates, please don't look at me with different eyes….

(Linling, grade 11)

I am only a number, nothing more or less

That was the midterm examination in the first term of grade 8. Everybody prepared seriously and we all worked very hard for the examinations. Of course, I was one of them, wanting the high rank, but also a good seat in the classroom. At that time, the seats were arranged according to the examination performance. Of course, nobody likes to sit in the back. After examinations, I still do not feel relaxed; — I am worried about my examination results. Actually, I notice the other students, especially those already sitting in the front like me, too, are very nervous. They are more nervous than I am. I know how serious it is. If you are falling behind in the rank, the teachers will blame you, Mom and Dad will blame you. Classmates will laugh at you, too. I remember that when I finally got the test result, I felt numbed. I wept… I got the 15th in that midterm exam, and was moved from the first row to the fourth row in the class. I feel I am only a number, nothing more or less. Since then, I start to hate exams, hate it all through…

(Yan, grade 10)

Being put away

The grades of the term exams have been announced. It is like a winter storm that chills me all the way through. I have always been an excellent student, but this time I am in trouble. I can't believe that I failed in one subject. What is even worse, I am squeezed out of the "elite class". There are three students that have been eliminated, and I am the only girl. "You three follow *me!" Teacher Zhang's face is stern and shows no trace of mercy. I know that after she puts us away, she will surely give another warning to the "lucky dogs" who are allowed to remain in the elite class: "You'd better study twice as hard. Only if you keep yourself in the first 60 in the whole class, can you enter college smoothly. Otherwise, you will be removed from the class just like those three. And you will have almost no hope of entering a college!"*

With tears smarting my eyes, I pick up my schoolbag and the piles of my reference materials, exercise collections and test papers from my desk. At this moment, how I wish that somebody would come to give me some comfort and encouragement. Even just a word! However, when I raise my head, what I see makes me even sadder: some students are celebrating their stay by drawing a cross on their chest, murmuring "Thank God. You saved me in this class." Some, rubbing their bottle-bottom like eyeglass lenses, make preparations for the next class. And, those Olympic Test winners: they are still holding the thick books, studying the questions only college students will start to learn. --- The whole class seems indifferent to our fate. As I leave, one of my classmates utters a farewell, "Hope to see you in college". Hope? Hope to see me in a college. Is there indeed any hope when dropping out of the elite class?

Dragging my feet, I follow Teacher Zhang along with the other two students to another "world" --- the world of "ordinary class". We all lower our heads, as if we have done something wrong. We are too ashamed to look at the others.

(Pan Ting, grade 12)

Simply can't get away

...I rush out of the classroom like an arrow towards the bicycle shed. I feel a sense of relief at once out of range of the noisy discussion about the answers to the exam questions. "Let them discuss it! I don't want to do that! I want to have a good weekend!"

The campus is beautiful, all green. There is an ancient poem that describes this perfectly. Is it written by Wang Wei? Seems it is... Oh no. I am thinking about the exam again. Forget about the poem.

Looking afar, there are a bundle of yellow flowers growing in the middle of the playground. They look so beautiful. One, two, ... Hey? It is the same as my answer to the last exam item! If it is a wrong answer, 10 points will be lost, plus two unfilled blanks. It would be hopeless to enter the first 15 in the class. I shake my head and walk towards the bicycle shed. Why can't I find a student on the way? Perhaps, they are all in the classroom checking their answers with each other. And what would they think of me walking away like this? Do substances absorb heat when they are boiling? What is the difference between "other" and "another"? I simply can't get away from the examination atmosphere!

I pause. Thinking that I have to face my Daddy's persistent inquiry, my head feels numb. Let's face it. I need to get it clear in my mind so I have something clear to tell my parents, and so I will also feel comfortable. The *weekend will also feel better. Even if my answers are wrong, I should not cheat myself. I start to turn and run back towards the classroom.*

I rush into the classroom. "Is the answer of the last mathematic question 21?" I shout at the crowd.

(Liu Xin, grade 11)

After all, I know that I am a superior student

It is not yet 6 o'clock in the morning. But I am already wide-awake. I feel overwhelmed. The moment that the teacher gave me my exam result keeps recurring in my thoughts. She spoke quite quickly. This time, I received such a low grade. I cannot believe what has happened to me! I cannot remain in bed. I am thinking that if I am a middle level student, I should not act like this. I should accept my situation. However, what tortures me is that I feel that I am a good student. In the past I have usually felt victorious upon hearing my grades. I crawl out of bed. The sleepless night made my whole body ache.

I silently go through the textbooks, checking every uncertainty that I may have about my memory of the test. The strange thing is that I cannot find any mistake that I could have made. Could it be that my exam paper was graded wrong? But I had already asked and the teacher told me that she has checked it. Is it possible that they counted it wrong? How I wish it was true!

Mom asked me last night about the exam results. But I was evasive. I stubbornly think that there is still hope that my grade could be changed. After all, I know that I am a superior student.

(Haibin, grade 10)

Dad is more nervous than I am, for I felt his hand tremble

There are 56 students in my class. Most of us are village children. We carry with us the grand task of rising up and giving glory to our family. All of us students are very clear about this; we must change ourselves into bookworms, and bury ourselves in the foot-high simulated test papers. Books torture us a lot, and even worse, we still have to endure the class teacher's torture: "Don't waste your precious time! To wear leather shoes or straw shoes (to become rich or poor), the National College Entrance Examination is the dividing line." Finishing these words, he solemnly writes this line on the board: "There are only 25 days to CEE exams" on a most conspicuous spot in the classroom. Not being able to bear looking at this, a little later someone secretly removes the word "only" from the board. This makes us feel more relaxed, though time still flies like an arrow.

I have become the special person in my family. I do not need to do anything except study. For the first time, my parents quarrel about my diet. Dad thinks that I should eat mainly meat so as to add more nutrition; Mom insists that I should eat more vegetables to maintain a clear head. The quarreling goes on and on. So Dad manages to get a whole bunch of books, and finally they reach an agreement: during the examination preparation period, eat mainly meat, and during examination taking period, eat mostly vegetables. I often see my fragile grandma fold her hands in front of her chest, *muttering some words. I know, she is praying for me. In her family, there have not been any university students so far. Naturally, she hopes that her eldest grandson can finally fulfill this goal and earn the family the glory.*

Two days left. Dad asks me to come and he pats me on the shoulder in a forced relaxed manner: "Take it easy. It matters nothing if you fail. You know, Zhu Yuanzhang (the first emperor of Ming dynasty) did not know even one word, and he still became the great emperor." As a matter of fact, Dad is more nervous than I am, for I felt his hand tremble, when he patted on my shoulder.

(Ding, grade 12)

Eighteen years of life has carried too much pressure

As the others do, I go to bed early. I don't know why, my head is still full of English words, and mathematical formulas. I start to count; this is one of the methods that the teacher taught us to handle stressful situations. I cannot help but curse the class teacher: "What a damned 'good' method! I have already counted ten thousand; the more numbers I count, the more awake I am!" I get up from bed angrily. My dormitory roommate Yong also sits up, and shakes his head painfully: He has already counted to 15 thousand.

The next day, I walk towards the exam field with a heavy head. The school playground is packed with people. It seems there are more parents than students. Every examination center has made available an emergency room. Exam takers need it. Their parents also need it. Standing under the scorching sun for several hours, our parents are really amazing. The first test is Chinese

Language and Literature. The exam is almost halfway through when a student is caught cheating. It causes quite a stir. The incident has hardly subsided when two female students faint, one after another. This is really a tough battle.

Eventually, students begin to exit the examination room. Parents mill around, asking this and asking that. My Beida (Beijing University) dream shattered, I walk out of the classroom. I feel numb. In the distance, my father is walking towards me. I rush into his arms and cry. Eighteen years of life has carried too much pressure: teachers' expectations, parents' dreams, and our own hopes for the future. They weigh on our shoulders like mountains. "I did not want to come, but your Mom insisted on it." Again and again Dad excuses himself, patting me on my head. He searches everywhere in the shops along the streets and buys me some calming pills. He gives me a small piece of the pill, "Take it. Have a good nap after lunch."

(Qing, grade 12)

Waiting for the day the results will be announced

The examination takes three days. And three days of hard battle finally come to an end. When we leave the examination hall, we sense the freedom and expanse of the outside world. Some students cry from sheer relief. When Dad sees me he rushes towards me. He looks at me anxiously, not daring to ask. "No problem!" I say with relaxed confidence. Dad smiles, his smile is so sweet, just like a young child.

The days of torture are not over yet. We may no longer feel panicked, but we are still uneasy. The long waiting has begun, waiting for the final verdict: Shall I be wearing straw shoes or leather shoes? I become very lazy, and lie on my bed all day. I often see the image of the girls who fainted or those who were full of tears. Dad cannot sit still either. Taking out his abacus, and bringing out the record of admission grades of the recent years, he is estimating the grades I could get. The calculations make him sometimes worried, sometimes joyous.

(Wing, grade 12)

Getting the results

The day the official grades will be announced arrives at last. Everyone in the family gets up very early, as if to welcome the New Year's Day. My heart is beating very fast, too afraid to face that grade. I suggest that Dad go. He seems also very nervous. Rubbing his hands, he says to me hesitatingly, "Perhaps it is better you go!" It is true. But sometimes we feel cowardly. With Mother's intervention, Father finally goes alone. Now there is the quiet waiting. The whole family sits together silently. We are all wondering how Father is at that moment: crestfallen with his head sunken, or delighted, dancing with his hands and feet. The sun passes over our heads. We all forget to have lunch. We don't have telephone, so we can only wait. The sun is setting now. Dad has not come back yet. I painfully lie on the bed, "It is all over! Dad does not dare to come home!"

"Bang", someone pushes the door heavily open. A gust of alcoholic smell reaches us. Father is completely drunk and beyond himself. "You made it! You made it!" he shouts.

I am so lucky. And that year I am admitted to Hunan Normal University.

(Zhang, grade 12)

The pressure of silence

It is the evening before the grand examination day. I am reviewing the materials for the tests. Mom is in the living room, knitting a sweater and Dad is quietly reading the newspaper. I am sitting in front of my study desk, carefully reviewing all the things that I have learned. However, I cannot concentrate. Other days, it may not be noisy, but it is not as silent as today, which gives me a sense of pressure. When I think of the exams tomorrow, my heartbeat accelerates. In a place as quiet as this, I can even hear the sound of my own heartbeat. Mom and Dad ask me to go to bed early so as to collect more energy for the next day, but I stay up until 11 studying. Of course, this extra time of review has little effect, but it seems that I get some comfort from it.

(Sun, grade 10)

The sound of pens writing

The noisy classroom suddenly quiets down when the teacher enters with the examination papers. All is quiet, so quiet that we could hear the sound of a needle falling to the ground. This is the examination room. This is the *battlefield we are going to fight in. Here is the place that we show our academic achievements.*

I admire those students who are sitting straight. They are calm, very confident, a tinge of a smile lingering on their mouths, whereas my heart almost jumps out of my chest. How come that I cannot calm myself down?

It is as if I see many eyes looking at me. Oh, they are my teachers, my mom and dad. They look like they are speaking to me: have confidence in yourself and try your best. Now I calm down a little bit, holding the pen up. This pen is the embodiment of adults' expectation.

"Dinging, dangling,…" the clear sound of bell is ringing, the horn for the dash blows. The classroom becomes even quieter. The sound of pens writing is all you can hear. Item One I finish very quickly. Then I finish the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Item Two. No 6. Gosh! I am stuck at this item. I don't know what to fill in the first blank. One minute, another minutes passes, I racked my brain, sweat dripping down from my forehead. I try very hard to recall what the teachers taught in class. Oh, I didn't listen carefully. It is my fault. Oh! Let's move to the next item. As I am about to try the next item, the door of my memory seems to open to reveal a tinge of light. Aha, that is it! I almost jump up. I proudly look around, and see everybody is wasting no time in finishing the test. Now I see, it is not yet the time to get excited, I blame myself. "The one who laughs last laughs the best," I tell myself not to be too proud…

(Jiang, grade 8)

The air is so tense

"Lei, what is your score in math this term?"

"Dad, I didn't get a good grade. In mathematics I have 90, in language, uh, I… have 76 points."

"What?!" Before my sister finished speaking, Dad's demeanor has already changed such that I dare not look at it. The whole house is dead quiet. My sister nervously rubs her small hands. She looks down. I am not able to see her eyes, only the tears down her cheeks. I cannot bear to see my sister so sad. But I also know my Dad's temper. This is not the right time to defend my sister. The three of us stand there in the tiny square living space of our house. The air is so tense that I seem not be able to breathe.

(Qianqian, grade 7)

Daydream

In a blink, it is Sunday again. In elementary school Sundays are filled with just a few homework assignments. But in the middle school, homework can pile up higher than me. For example, take the homework assigned to us for this weekend! The big essay, the small composition, copying English words, 20 math problems and three test papers to complete… these are all tedious and awfully boring…

Gradually, I change into an exquisite, beautiful and genius homework machine. This homework machine works not only very fast, but also writes very beautifully. I observe my body curiously: it has a lot of switches. It is writing exactly as I usually do. No difference at all. What is most striking about *it is that it can write very fast. A writing assignment only needs two minutes to finish. When it is time to go to school, I will be changed back into myself. Whenever I want to be changed back into the machine, I only need to say one word, "homework-machine." Then I become a homework machine.*

Ever since I became able to change myself into a homework machine, my assignments are very well done. I always receive compliments from all subject teachers. I feel very happy… I cannot help but shout aloud, "Dear homework machine, I love you!"

"What"? My dad looks at me strangely and asks, "Homework machine? What are you talking about?"

Oh, I wake up with a startle. I was daydreaming just now. "Nothing, nothing, nothing," I respond quickly. Looking around, I notice that the sun is setting already… but I have only finished a small part of the homework assignments! What a day! I heave a sigh, if only I could turn myself into a homework machine now…

(Jiawei, grade 7)

More marks

On August 30, the day I receive the result of the junior high graduation examinations, I feel my heart is bleeding.

It takes me a huge amount of courage to tell the results to my mother. She changes into another person. Her smile disappears. She then asks me *about the results of the other kids that I know. As I tell her, Mom starts blaming me: "They go to the same school just like you. How come that they can get more marks, and you cannot!" From that day, Mom watches me all the time, letting me do nothing but reading and writing.*

On September 4, the day for senior high schools student registration, Mom reluctantly gives me the school tuition fees, "Other kids only need to pay 1200 yuan, but you need 3600yuan. This is the punishment we receive for you not working hard."

The first day, the teacher puts me in the last row in the classroom. One Wednesday evening, the teacher in charge calls me to her office and says to me, "Your Mom paid the school triple the money as the others to get you in. Do you know that? You must work harder. Although your junior high school graduation exam marks were bad, it does not mean that you need to get bad marks in the coming years. Though we know we should not judge students by marks only, the whole of society ask for marks. The universities also ask for marks. Remember that!"

(Chunsheng, grade 10)

Teacher praise

After the mid term examination, I go to the mathematics teacher's office to see how much I got for the math exam. I am so delighted when the teacher tells me the marks I received: 91. Although this was not the highest mark, only four students in the whole school in my grade achieved above 90.

I feel very satisfied with my marks this time. On Monday morning class, the math teacher comes in with all smiles. He says, "Generally speaking, the examination results in the whole grade were not good. It shows that the math problems tested this time are very difficult. Even so, there are two in our class who made over 90! One is Wu Zhengxing, the other is Ma Dawei." Each of them will be awarded an elegant notebook." When I get the prize, my heart beats hard; I feel my face become red. Then the teacher continues, "Wu and Ma have been selected to participate in the Hope Cup, our National Mathematic Contest..." Hearing this, my heart beat even faster. I am so excited!

That night I cannot sleep for all the excitement. My head is full of thoughts: What if I can get an award in this national contest?! … I have a dream… In the dream, I see the math teacher. He is encouraging me, showing his support for me, asking me to calm down and have confidence in myself.

(Zijiang, grade 8)

What is all this for?

The teacher rushes angrily into the classroom. The storm is coming. This is how we all feel during the short Monday class meeting before class starts.

We all understand immediately what this means. The whole class quiets down. The teacher's eyes become blue, emitting two beams of light like *swords, killing all the resistance we have – we all lower our heads, waiting to be slain.*

"Look at how terrible you all did on the exam!" Hearing his roaring voice, we all lower our heads further. He continues, "Our class is 'No. 1' from the bottom, the lowest rank again! Did you not study? None of you entered the first 10 of the whole grade. The average rate of passing students is so low! If things continue like this, how can you face the junior high graduation examinations? This must change! You are to tell your parents to come here this Sunday. I want to have a meeting with them."

Another storm is looming. Such days feel like they will never end. I don't remember what the teacher says next…

Such is our commission: study hard. But haven't we studied hard? What is all this for?

(Liqing, grade 11)

I retook the exam

In June, 2001, I retook the junior high school examination. Mom seemed more scared than I was. Late that night, both Mom and I could not sleep. I know the exam means more to my Mom than to me. Early next morning, I was awakened by the noise of Mom moving about. I went to the window of my room and blame Mom for my sleepless night. Mom said nothing, and went into the kitchen. I followed her. Mom was frying eggs for me. She wept while I finished eating the eggs.

Meanwhile I have gone to the countryside and now I am back after two weeks of absence. As I enter the house, I see my mother's face is relaxed. I know then that I have been admitted to the key senior high school. I have never felt so relieved.

(Daqing, grade 9)

Pressure

The senior high school entrance examinations are the first turning point of my life. I know that I should give all that I have learned in the past a thorough review. However I find it really scary when the teacher warns us repeatedly in class, "Nowadays the SHS entrance examination is more difficult than the University Entrance Examination. People used to say CEC exam is like a millions of soldiers passing over a single wood bridge. Now people say SHS exam is more like this. As long as you pass the SHS, one of your feet has already made it across the threshold of a university." I know he is trying to make us realize the importance of the exams we are facing now. But the pressure is too heavy for us to endure.

After the exams, before the results are announced, Mom's and Dad's mutterings jam our ears: "If you succeed, you must go. Even if we have to sell everything in our house, we will support you; if you do not succeed, then you go back home and do farming for the family. I don't have the money to buy you in." I am already very tired. This is yet another burden that presses me too much.

The announcement letter is finally received. I should have been able to relax for a while, throwing the burden of exams and expectations into the Pacific for the moment. But no, Mom and Dad become talkative again to me: I should not be proud, I should work harder. Study more seriously and prepare for a key university. They have bought me yet another pile of complementary materials to augment the curriculum. I feel that the burden becomes even heavier than before.

How I wish that this time of my life was over.

(Xiaofei, grade 10)

The Experience of Cheating in the Exam

"Sha, sha…" The sound of sorting and handing out the exam papers. I am so nervous. My heart is beating very fast, pounding so loud as if it is about to jump out! This is a unit test. In this unit, there are many English words that I have not memorized yet. If they appear in the test… Oh my god! It would be like having a tasty candy, but you have to give it up if you have a toothache!

I take the test papers from the teacher, while praying in my heart: God help me, not to meet any way-blocking tiger. Help me! I tried my best to calm down and control myself. I first do the easy questions. It goes well at the beginning. But then, I am stuck by the 20-mark filling-in-blanks-with-words item. My hands are trembling. I say to myself: do not be afraid. I put in a few words, and… I am thinking of the English textbook that is under the desk. It is so tempting. I need to get a good mark. My left hand starts to move around *under the desk. Sweat drops roll off my forehead. I say to myself: do it. The teacher will not notice. Finally, I make up my mind. I am watching the teacher, and in the meanwhile, my left hand is flipping through the pages under the desk. I soon find the right page. The moment I lower my head and start reading, I hear the teacher's voice, "Zhanglong, hand your exam paper to me." I grow pale. It is like thunder on a fine day. All finished. I don't remember when my exam paper was confiscated. I do not come back to myself until quite a while later.*

(Xiaoling Chen, grade 7)

Scared

I was 11 years old. Our language arts teacher was "publicly-recognized" as an excellent teacher, because the students she taught before have done well in the examinations. But I did not know why. I did not like her at all. I remember one dark night--after two hours of self-study I was not allowed to leave class until very late because I did not get 100 points in the dictation test. I was instructed to copy every English word 10 times for punishment. I felt very bored in the language arts class, and now I felt it was more difficult to memorize these new words. That night, I went home at 10 pm. It was really a terrible experience for me to go home alone at ten o'clock in the pitch darkness of the night. This happened several years ago. Every time when I think of it, I feel scared again.

(Xuemei, grade 7)

Prodigy

My mom registered me in a writing training class. This is still my first time participating in the extracurricular writing class. Unexpectedly, I received 94 on my first composition. The record so far is 96, only another two points and I will break the record. Ha, ha, ha… thinking about this, I feel very proud.

Arriving home, I immediately report this good news to Mom. Mom is even more excited than I am, and says to me with all smiles, "My son! My effort is not in vain! You must have a superior intelligence. Yes, you are a prodigy!" Hearing this, I reply doubtfully, "Really?" "Yes, absolutely yes!" Mom says with complete confidence.

Then, Mom says to me, "From now on, I don't want you to play with those children in the neighborhood." I protest immediately: "They are my best friends!" But Mom says, "When I say 'no' then it is no." And she continues, "From now on, you will read English for two hours, read books on composition for one hour. I want you to take reading notes, to do basic writing exercises, two pages every day. I want you to write one composition…" Hearing this, I became very upset I rush to my room and cry.

I know, of course, that I have to listen to Mom's words. However, ever since she finds out that I am a "prodigy," she demands that I should get grades no less than 94, but also that I should try to get the highest grades in all other subjects. Therefore, every day from now on, I have to struggle with heavy assignments — assignments from teachers as well as from my Mom.

(Liangliang Lin, grade 7)

Don't play

Ever since grade 5, I have always been among the top three students in class in tests. I am used to standing on the platform receiving prizes from the teacher and the applause from my fellow schoolmates. The prizes range from storybooks, dictionaries to all sorts of stationery that a primary pupil may find useful. The prize presentations usually take place at the assembly before the lesson starts.

This year, I come first in 5C and the prize is quite bulky and heavy, and wrapped in fancy paper. It is old Chinese tradition not to unwrap prizes or gifts until you are home. As usual, I put the prize intact in my school bag. Honestly speaking, I must confess that I did try to feel it with my fingers to see what is inside. Judging from the edges and size, I am sure there are at least 2 big files.

After school, I walk home with light gallops. The first thing I do is to show my trophy to mom.

"I came first in class this term." I hand over the prize and the school report.

"Yes." She then unwraps the "parcel".

Good gracious! There are two big files, a notebook, two or three pencils and, most appealing of all, a table-tennis bat. The bat is not the commonly seen one. It is rectangular, a yellow one.

If I have this bat, I need not ask classmates to lend me theirs at recess.

My bat is so special that every classmate will envy me and ask me to lend it to them. I will become their star in Ping Pong. I indulge in my dream while my eyes are fixed on the bat.

"Remember to work harder. Don't play." Mom says softly, returning all the stuff to me except the bat.

From that time onwards, I've never seen the special bat again. I am still looking for the vanished bat.

(Jennifer, Hong Kong project)

Then he beats me

I remember the day when Miss Wong, my English teacher, was returning the dictation exams. It actually happened many times like this.

"Liz!" Miss Wong says. I stand up, and walk slowly towards the teacher's desk. My heart beats fast. Miss Wong passes my dictation book to me. But I dare not open it. I am afraid that I do not have a good mark. Whenever I receive a failing mark my father gets angry and beats me. The passing mark of the dictation is 60. If I get a mark of 55, then he will hit me 5 times--the difference between the passing mark and my mark.

I breathe deeply, trying my best to keep calm. Then I turn over the first page. My heart sinks. My mark is only 40. Oh, my God, I have studied hard but my performance is so poor. Why? What is wrong with me? Panic comes over me. I try to hold back my tears. I do not want my classmates to notice that I am sobbing.

Miss Wong tells me that I have to show my parents and have them sign the dictation book.

When I get home, my parents are already there. I can feel my heart beating very fast again. I take out my dictation book and pass it to my father. He opens it and glares at me. Then, without saying a word, he takes out the long wooden ruler from his room.

He stands in front of me and says, "I do not hit your right hand! You need it to do your homework. Open your left hand! 20 strokes!" He makes me open my left hand.

And then he beats me.

Tears pour down my face.

(Christina, Hong Kong project)

She finally made it

Jill was a quiet schoolgirl of 15 who lived in an apartment near us.She worked very hard to be one of the few "head girls" at school. But no matter how hard she tried, she just could not be the first in class.

Her mom kept reminding her of how excellent her cousins had been doing and how her older brother had won first prizes. Actually, her academic performance was not bad. She was one of the top five in class over the past 3 years. However, her mom never praised her.

One day before the exam results were released, Jill gave everything she had to her good friend, including a Barbie doll that she had had for years. She *wrote to her Mom and Dad apologizing for failing to be the 'first in class'. She then put on her school uniform claiming that she was going back to school. However, she never reached school because she was found dead near her home on the same day. She plunged to her death from the top of the 32-storeyed building after slashing her wrist.*

When her mom received Jill's report card, she found that Jill had achieved "first" in her class. She finally had made it.

(Lucy, Hong Kong project)

I feel that the door began to distance me from my mom and dad

After I entered junior high school, the pressures and tasks to study became much heavier than ever before. My spare time after school was almost all spent in front of my study desk. Mom and Dad showed their special care for me. In order to let me study quietly, and not be disturbed by the noise of the television, the door to the family room was closed all night. On the other side of the door my mom was knitting some sweater and Dad was watching TV programs, and then there was that soft light. Behind the door was me, surrounded by all the books scattered on my desk and my lonely desk lamp. Gradually, I learned not to go to Mom and Dad's room for a chat. Mom and Dad do not want me to come over to talk, not even for a bit, lest it would waste my precious time. I feel that door began to distance me from my mom and dad.

One night, I could not bear the loneliness any longer and went into my parents' room, hoping to feel the warmth of their affections. But I discovered that my parents' faces no longer bear smiles. I understood. I should go back to my study desk. I quietly went back to my own room. That door has been closed, keeping me from the soft light. I know nobody can talk with me freely. But, every night I still hope, hoping that door will open, hoping to see the soft light coming through the door.

(Yin Yin, grade 8)

Recognition

"Hush! Mrs Leung is coming. She has got our exam papers!"

All the girls fall back into place as Sandra, our sentry, whispers out her warnings. I have a feeling of excitement and tension. This is the moment that I have been waiting for, the return of our first English exam paper in grade 9.

Mrs. Leung starts to hand back the papers. It is her practice to rank order the students, and keep papers in the same mark range in bundles. First the papers with marks in the fifties go out, then the sixties, etc. We all keep our fingers crossed that our names will not be called too soon. Finally, we come to the nineties and there are only a few papers in the pile.

"Mary, well done," says Mrs. Leung. So, Mary who usually gets the top marks has been called. Next is Kim, who is always the apple of the teacher's eye. I try hard to conceal a secret smile of satisfaction.

Finally, when my name is called, Mrs. Leung pauses and announces to the whole class, "I am really very impressed with Kathy's work. She is the only girl who got 100% correct on section II of the paper, the comprehension section. Well done Kathy!"

All eyes are on me now.

"Good work, Kathy!" "Congratulations!"

I receive my paper amidst the clapping of hands. This is the moment I have been waiting for since the beginning of the year: the invisible, quiet little girl suddenly glows and becomes visible. The same happens year after year. At first teachers only notice the more vocal girls. For too long I feel that I have been ignored but now I have regained my rightful place among the "elites."

Then, alas! I see it: the answer to the third question, the 's' for the third person singular is missing from one of the verbs! My exam paper is not 100% correct! I am panic-stricken.

I steal a glance at Diana sitting next to me. Has she noticed my mistake? All the girls are either busy checking their own marks or trying to argue for more with the teacher. My mind is a total blank.

"Now I have to collect your exam paper again. Please pass them up," says Mrs. Leung.

In the confusion, I pick up my pen and add a little 's' to fill in the missing bit.

(Chai Ling, Hong Kong project)

Now that student is number 1

I don't remember much from my childhood but there is one event that I still distinctly remember from grade one. It has stayed with me all my life, for more than 40 years.

It was the end of the school year and the teacher had handed out nice prizes for all the students who had done well that year. Many students received prizes and the teacher gave me a sweet stuffed bear. When I came home I showed the bear to my father and told him that the teacher had given it to me because I had done such fine work.

But my father did not smile. He remained quiet. Then he said, "You received this prize because you are number 13." And he looked at me, and inquired softly, "Do you remember what student was the first one to get up? Now that student is number 1."

I looked into my father's face and felt very strange.

From then on my prize was not sweet any longer. That day gave me a whole different understanding of school.

(Dong, Hong Kong project)

Caught in Cheating in the exam

In school, there are times that we feel nervous and headache, especially students like me who usually do very well in exams, because we hope that every time we will be in the top ranking. Because of this strong desire, we don't want to lose even one point! We treat every exam very carefully; dare not let go of our nerves, lest we lag behind.

There was one time I remember very clearly, something unexpected happened in the history exam, when I was in grad 9 – I haven't been well prepared for the coming exam, somehow I felt that.

When exam paper was handed out, as usual, I scanned all the question items in the paper. Great! Except for one question, all the others have been caught by me in my preparation for this exam. I felt very excited. "Don't rush. Do it one by one." I said to myself. Very soon, I finished all the choice items, filling blank items, map filling items. I heaved a sigh of relief. Good! I should have more than 90 points this time. Now, I am doing the QA items one by one. Now, the "Xingchou Treaty"! I can't remember its content well. I know the historical date of this event, but I can't remember the exact content…

If I could answer the question correctly, then I can get 100 points. Isn't that nice? But I cannot remember the content of the treaty, how… Suddenly, I thought of cheating. I have never cheated before. The thought of cheating makes me tremble. I have never done this before. I have always been a good student, what a shameful act it would be if I was caught! People would look down upon me. They might think that all my previous good achievements are all …. My thoughts are going wild. I constantly asked myself. Should I do it or not do it? Once in a while, I imitated the act of cheating; laying down my head on the desk, at the same time look at the teacher. Thinking that only one question answered correctly will award me with 100 points, I am really reluctantly to give it up.

A moment later, the teacher seems sleepy. The chance has come! I immediately ask my deskmate Ming to pass the answer to me. In no second, I got the slip of paper with the answer. Excited, plus nervous, I could not hold the pen stable with my trembling hand. While copying the answer, I even have to copy word by word, so nervous that I could not remember one word or one sentence. My palms, back and chest begin to sweat. There are still a few more words to copy. But the teacher saw it. I quickly throw the paper away. The teacher is coming towards me. I feel that everything is gone. I am finished! My flushed hot face and hand make me really uneasy. I was caught!

(Yijun, grade 7)

Examination Moment

The exam today is mathematics, the subject I fear most.

The first bell rings already. I am still outside the classroom, trying to rehearse the various formulas. Again and again I flip though the handbook and the past examination papers, all the while reciting silently those points that seem important. I am called in by the teacher. Seeing that all other students are so calm and confident, I feel ashamed of myself. Now I hear the teacher say, "Time to start." Like a starting shot in a race, everyone rushes to open the test book and start off.

I've forgotten all my anxieties and I jump right into the test and start writing.

(Hairong, grade 10)

Fairness

This is the first midterm exam since I entered the junior high school. Just because it is the first, I treat it with all seriousness. I have prepared myself pretty thoroughly. When the exam papers are handed out, I quickly skim the whole paper and find that the questions are all within the scope of my review. In half an hour, I have finished the whole paper. I feel very happy.

I look around, and see that most of my classmates are still carefully working on their papers; except for a few students who are obviously copying each other's answers. They are cheating! No way, this is like robbery! I feel annoyed. They should not be able to get away with this. It is not fair to me and the others! I want to report them to our teacher. But, how can I do this?

Just then, I hear the teacher say, "The student in seat 4 in row 2—keep your eyes on your own work. Don't ever think of cheating!" Oh no! He is looking at me. I immediately raise my hand and respond, "No it's not me. It is Chan Wei who is copying from his book under the desk." Teacher Zhang says, "Okay. Stop it. That's enough. Chan Wei is doing fine! But you're looking around makes me suspicious that you are the one who wants to cheat."

Chan Wei stares at me with hatred.

(Wu You, grade 8)

We should be honest, shouldn't we!

That was a language arts test. I was very confident that I should be one of the top three. However, when the announcements come out, the result was *far from what I expected. When the exam paper was handed out, I checked the items one by one. And I found that there is one 10-point item that I should have done right. But why was I so careless? I blame myself. Strong vanity drives me to erase the wrong answer and replace it with the correct answer. Then I took the paper and showed it to the teacher with trembling hands. Seeing it, the teacher knew immediately what I had done, but he did not expose me. He responds as if he suddenly realizes something, "Oh… Perhaps I made a mistake. What does the old saying say again? Yes. 'If you did something wrong, then correct it.' Right?" He then added 10 points to my paper, and said to me, "We should be honest, shouldn't we?" The marks have been added, but the teacher's comments make me uneasy for several days… In the end, I told the teacher what I had done …*

This little incident, perhaps in many people's eye, is just a small thing. But for me, it changed me greatly.

(Meixue, grade 9)

Chapter 5 Interpreting Themes

In this chapter the experiential anecdotes from chapter 4 are interpreted for possible themes. The claim is not that these are the only themes or even the most central themes. Rather, the attempt is made to constantly ask: What does this story have to do with the experience of examinations? How does it speak about exams? What are the possible meanings experienced here? And what is it that gives this experience (this anecdote) its possible meanings?

Anecdote texts	**Themes**
I am a low grade student *I am working on math problems with all other boarding school classmates during the second evening study hour. I work hard on it for quite a while, but I still cannot get the right answer. Now, I look at Zhang, the "Genius" in my class, so I tiptoe over to him. He patiently explains the solution to me. Hey, I am so stupid; I still do not understand it. He explains it to me from the very beginning again. But I still do not get it. Finally, Zhang simply writes down the process for me. I really feel guilty bothering him*	Even in everyday school situations students may experience a difference in their own academic (in)ability as compared to the inferior or superior ability of others.

further, so I tear off the page, planning to think further about the solution back in my own seat.	
I am just sitting down when the teacher-in-charge comes in. He reprimands me sternly, "What are you doing?! Walking here and there and disturbing your classmates?! If you don't want to study, then get out of the classroom!" *I feel numb for quite a while afterwards. Looking at his cruel face, I want to go home; I do not want to study further. However, giving a second thought to my future and my ambition, I finally accept it.*	The teacher is giving the student a low (verbal) "mark." He is not valuing the student as important.
I am a "low-grade" student, a real, authentic low-grade student. I am the staircase for high-grade students; I am the scapegoat for good students to excuse themselves for decreasing grades, the laughing stock for my classmates, the nail in teachers' eyes, the worries of my parents' heart… All of these miseries are mine only because I did badly in examinations. (Xiaoqiang, grade 11)	Marks and grades are powerful sources of influence that shape students' sense of self-identity. Marks and grades give status. High grades on tests and exams is associated with success, worth, and positive self-identity. A low grade on tests and exams is associated with failure, lack of worth, and negative self-identity.

An unworthy nobody	
I walk into class—late. The lesson has begun. But before I can explain why I am late the teacher turns to me angrily. He scolds me and tells me that I am no good and should not bother to come at all if I cannot be on time. I meekly sit down. Some of the students laugh at me. They do not feel compassion. I have a hard time concentrating on the lesson as I am still hurting from the teacher's cruel words. Then the door opens and another student walks in. It is Hao Lee. He is one of the top students in our class. But instead of scolding him for being late, the teacher tells Hao to open his book on the page where we are reading. Now I feel even more hurt. The teacher treats Hao with kindness and respect while he regards me as an unworthy nobody.	Evaluation takes place even in non-test, non-examination situations. In the teacher's remarks, posture, tone of voice, facial gesture, etc. are contained evaluative judgments and valuative qualities that may cut deep into a student's sense of self. For some students this evaluative experience may be (very) positive, for others it may be (very) negative.
When a good student asks the teacher whether a math problem has a simpler solution, the teacher praises him for his deep questioning. But the same math problem, the same question from a low-grade student, and	Students may experience the halo effect of their general test performance. If they do well on

the same teacher comments with a mocking tone, "You are splitting hairs; don't expect to walk up to the sky with one step!" When a high grade student wins a race in track and field, the teacher praises him for his intelligence, morality and physicality; whereas when the same race is won by a low grader, the teacher says you "only know how to play, but don't know how to focus your energy on your study." When high grade and lower-grade students make the same mistakes, the teacher reprimands the lower-grade students first, until it makes the student's face turn red or cry. Teachers are more generous to the high-grade, like Hao. If he is late for school, the teacher says with a light comment, "Come early next time, Hao". But if I, a lower-grade student, come late, the teacher will not listen though I may have a good excuse. He won't even mention my name. He will not listen; the punishment may be to stand outside the classroom for the whole period. *Too big difference, too much frustration! Why is it me who always has to clean the*	tests and exams then they may do well in the daily evaluative treatment they receive from the teacher. If they are low achieving students then they may be treated as inferior also in the ordinary social context of classroom life. The simple mention of their name may confer a sense of respect to a student. The student whose name is passed over may feel unworthy of being seen in their uniqueness.

classroom? Why does the teacher always let out his anger to me? Why it is me that is always laughed at by others? Why is it me that always must stand outside the classroom? I am a low-grade student. I have had enough bad treatment: the last two rows are always filled with fellows like me. I also want to remove my name from the black name list. But every effort I make is devastated by a cruel response. Then I despair and want to give up. In the student world, I am a true "proletarian". *Who does not want to be smart? Who does not want to be famous? Who does not want to enter Qinghua and Beida? I am a low grade, but I also have my ambition. I also have some shining spots of my own. Teachers, parents, classmates, please don't look at me with different eyes....* (Linling, grade 11)	The evaluative climate during lessons may create privileged and non-privileged "classes" in the class.
I am only a number, nothing more or less *That was the midterm examination in the first term of grade 8. Everybody prepared seriously and we all worked very hard for the*	Not unlike traveling by modern airlines, in some schools the

examinations. Of course, I was one of them, wanting the high rank, but also a good seat in the classroom. At that time, the seats were arranged according to the examination performance. Of course, nobody likes to sit in the back. After examinations, I still do not feel relaxed; --- I am worried about my examination results. Actually, I notice the other students, especially those already sitting in the front like me, too, are very nervous. They are more nervous than I am. I know how serious it is. If you are falling behind in the rank, the teachers will blame you, Mom and Dad will blame you. Classmates will laugh at you, too. I remember that when I finally got the test result, I felt numbed. I wept… I got the 15th in that midterm exam, and was moved from the first row to the fourth row in the class. I feel I am only a number, nothing more or less. Since then, I start to hate exams, hate it all through… (Yan, grade 10)	seating reflects the student's ranking: first class in the front, second class in the next rows, and economy class in the back. But, while passengers on an airline may receive temporary differential treatment of food, drinks, and comfort, students in school receive yearlong differential treatment in terms of their worth that is determined by the spatial position and line-up of every seat and every row of seats. The student feels that she becomes a number; and the number goes down. And as the number changes, it affects how people will look at the student and it will have consequences for the student's seating in class.

Being put away *The grades of the term exams have been announced. It is like a winter storm that chills me all the way through. I have always been an excellent student, but this time I am in trouble. I can't believe that I failed in one subject. What is even worse, I am squeezed out of the "elite class". There are three students that have been eliminated, and I am the only girl. "You three follow me!" Teacher Zhang's face is stern and shows no trace of mercy. I know that after she puts us away, she will surely give another warning to the "lucky dogs" who are allowed to remain in the elite class: "You'd better study twice as hard. Only if you keep yourself in the first 60 in the whole class, can you enter college smoothly. Otherwise, you will be removed from the class just like those three. And you will have almost no hope of entering a college!"* *With tears smarting my eyes, I pick up my schoolbag and the piles of my reference materials, exercise collections and test papers*	Like in a television "reality show" students may be removed from their class and classroom if they cannot keep up with their test performance. But unlike the unreality of a reality television show, the consequences for the students are real, permanent and lifelong. Here the teacher is experienced as speaking in an examination mode. It seems that the teacher always thinks about the examination, too

from my desk. At this moment, how I wish that somebody would come to give me some comfort and encouragement. Even just a word! However, when I raise my head, what I see makes me even sadder: some students are celebrating their stay by drawing a cross on their chest, murmuring "Thank God. You saved me in this class." Some, rubbing their bottle-bottom like eyeglass lenses, make preparations for the next class. And, those Olympic Test winners: they are still holding the thick books, studying the questions only college students will start to learn. --- The whole class seems indifferent to our fate. As I leave, one of my classmates utters a farewell, "Hope to see you in college". Hope? Hope to see me in a college. Is there indeed any hope when dropping out of the elite class? *Dragging my feet, I follow Teacher Zhang along with the other two students to another "world" --- the world of "ordinary class". We all lower our heads, as if we have done something wrong. We are too ashamed to look at the others.*	Being "put away" may mean taking away the hope that the student has a "future" in school and university. Being "put away" means to experience being marginalized, on the outside. The student no longer feels that she belongs.

(Pan Ting, grade 12)	
Simply can't get away *…I rush out of the classroom like an arrow towards the bicycle shed. I feel a sense of relief at once out of range of the noisy discussion about the answers to the exam questions. "Let them discuss it! I don't want to do that! I want to have a good weekend!"* *The campus is beautiful, all green. There is an ancient poem that describes this perfectly. Is it written by Wang Wei? Seems it is… Oh no. I am thinking about the exam again. Forget about the poem.* *Looking afar, there are a bundle of yellow flowers growing in the middle of the playground. They look so beautiful. One, two, … Hey? It is the same as my answer to the last exam item! If it is a wrong answer, 10 points will be lost, plus two unfilled blanks. It would be hopeless to enter the first 15 in the class. I shake my head and walk towards the bicycle shed. Why can't I find a student on the way? Perhaps, they are all in the classroom checking their answers with each*	Examinations do not just last a few hours. When the exam is over, the pressures and preoccupations remain. It is difficult to relax after exams that have such high stakes. And, thus, an anxiety-ridden exam experience may be prolonged for many more hours and even for days after the exam is officially finished.

other. And what would they think of me walking away like this? Do substances absorb heat when they are boiling? What is the difference between "other" and "another"? I simply can't get away from the examination atmosphere! *I pause. Thinking that I have to face my Daddy's persistent inquiry, my head feels numb. Let's face it. I need to get it clear in my mind so I have something clear to tell my parents, and so I will also feel comfortable. The weekend will also feel better. Even if my answers are wrong, I should not cheat myself. I start to turn and run back towards the classroom.* *I rush into the classroom. "Is the answer of the last mathematic question 21?" I shout at the crowd.* (Liu Xin, grade 11)	Examinations are like very significant events in which many Chinese parents take a detailed, very serious inquisitive interest. Students have to deal not only with the turmoil of exams but they have to remember details on which they will have to report at home.
After all, I know that I am a superior student *It is not yet 6 o'clock in the morning. But I am already wide-awake. I feel overwhelmed. The moment that the teacher gave me my exam result keeps recurring in my thoughts. She spoke quite quickly. This time, I received such a*	Sometimes grades on exams

low grade. I cannot believe what has happened to me! I cannot remain in bed. I am thinking that if I am a middle level student, I should not act like this. I should accept my situation. However, what tortures me is that I feel that I am a good student. In the past I have usually felt victorious upon hearing my grades. I crawl out of bed. The sleepless night made my whole body ache.	seem arbitrary or chance occurrences. Even talented students may sometimes (seemingly inexplicably) do badly on tests. And so it may seem that mere chance (luck or bad luck) may shape one's identity, decide one's worth, and determine one's fate.
I silently go through the textbooks, checking every uncertainty that I may have about my memory of the test. The strange thing is that I cannot find any mistake that I could have made. Could it be that my exam paper was graded wrong? But I had already asked and the teacher told me that she has checked it. Is it possible that they counted it wrong? How I wish it was true!	
Mom asked me last night about the exam results. But I was evasive. I stubbornly think that there is still hope that my grade could be changed. After all, I know that I am a superior student. (Haibin, grade 10)	A grade on a test can profoundly shake one's sense of self and self-worth.

Dad is more nervous than I am, for I felt his hand tremble	
There are 56 students in my class. Most of us are village children. We carry with us the grand task of rising up and giving glory to our family. All of us students are very clear about this; we must change ourselves into bookworms, and bury ourselves in the foot-high simulated test papers. Books torture us a lot, and even worse, we still have to endure the class teacher's torture: "Don't waste your precious time! To wear leather shoes or straw shoes (to become a rich man or a poor man), the national college entrance exam), CEE is the dividing line." Finishing these words, he solemnly writes this line on the board: "There are only 25 days to CEE exams" on a most conspicuous spot in the classroom. Not being able to bear looking at this, a little later someone secretly removes the word "only" from the board. This makes us feel more relaxed, though time still flies like an arrow.	The prospect of examinations places great burdens on children in terms of family expectations. For the child the family's pride and honor are at stake.

I have become the special person in my family. I do not need to do anything except study. For the first time, my parents quarrel about my diet. Dad thinks that I should eat mainly meat so as to add more nutrition; Mom insists that I should eat more vegetables to maintain a clear head. The quarreling goes on and on. So Dad manages to get a whole bunch of books, and finally they reach an agreement: during the examination preparation period, eat mainly meat, and during examination taking period, eat mostly vegetables. I often see my fragile grandma fold her hands in front of her chest, muttering some words. I know, she is praying for me. In her family, there have not been any university students so far. Naturally, she hopes that her eldest grandson can finally fulfill this goal and earn the family the glory. *Two days left. Dad asks me to come and he pats me on the shoulder in a forced relaxed manner: "Take it easy. It matters nothing if you fail. You know, Zhu Yuanzhang (the first emperor of Ming dynasty) did not know even*	At home, children may be treated as prize entries into a competitive race. But this kind of "specialness" and favoured recognition can also be experienced as burden for the child. It is hard for adults to hide the anxieties they feel on behalf of

one word, and he still became the great emperor." As a matter of fact, Dad is more nervous than I am, for I felt his hand tremble, when he patted on my shoulder. (Ding, grade 12)	their children. Children can sense the anxieties and moods of their parents.
Eighteen years of life has carried too much pressure *As the others do, I go to bed early. I don't know why, my head is still full of English words, and mathematical formulas. I start to count; this is one of the methods that the teacher taught us to handle stressful situations. I cannot help but curse the class teacher: "What a damned 'good' method! I have already counted ten thousand; the more numbers I count, the more awake I am!" I get up from bed angrily. My dormitory roommate Yong also sits up, and shakes his head painfully: He has already counted to 15 thousand.* *The next day, I walk towards the exam field with a heavy head. The school playground is packed with people. It seems there are more*	The examination is not a discrete event and a singular experience. Children may be experiencing the test or examination long before the actual event is starting—especially the night before. The child is already under the spell of the exam.

parents than students. Every examination center has made available an emergency room. Exam takers need it. Their parents also need it. Standing under the scorching sun for several hours, our parents are really amazing. The first test is Chinese Language and Literature. The exam is almost halfway through when a student is caught cheating. It causes quite a stir. The incident has hardly subsided when two female students faint, one after another. This is really a tough battle. *Eventually, students begin to exit the examination room. Parents mill around, asking this and asking that. My Beida (Beijing University) dream shattered, I walk out of the classroom. I feel numb. In the distance, my father is walking towards me. I rush into his arms and cry. Eighteen years of life has carried too much pressure: teachers' expectations, parents' dreams, and our own hopes for the future. They weigh on our shoulders like mountains. "I did not want to come, but your Mom insisted on it." Again and again Dad*	The examination is experienced as a family affair (sometimes three generations are present). Examinations that children must take may bring them closer to their parents who may experience extreme concern and worry about their child's health as well as the child's performance. Some parents feel the pain of their children but are at a loss of what to do and so give them a pill. (Other parents withhold emotions of love. They can only

excuses himself, patting me on my head. He searches everywhere in the shops along the streets and buys me some calming pills. He gives me a small piece of the pill, “Take it. Have a good nap after lunch.” (Qing, grade 12)	use threats to try to have their child succeed.)
Waiting for the final verdict *The examination takes three days. And three days of hard battle finally come to an end. When we leave the examination hall, we sense the freedom and expanse of the outside world. Some students cry from sheer relief. When Dad sees me he rushes towards me. He looks at me anxiously, not daring to ask. “No problem!” I say with relaxed confidence. Dad smiles, his smile is so sweet, just like a young child.* *The days of torture are not over yet. We may no longer feel panicked, but we are still uneasy. The long waiting has begun, waiting for the final verdict: Shall I be wearing straw shoes or leather shoes? I become very lazy, and lie on my bed all day. I often see the image of the girls who fainted or those who were full of tears. Dad*	Sometimes, students seem to experience exams in warlike moods: days of hard battle and torture. Taking an exam is a family experience in Chinese culture. (In Canada many parents do not have a clue when their children take important tests and exams.) Waiting is reliving the anxiety of the exam experience over and over.

cannot sit still either. Taking out his abacus, and bringing out the record of admission grades of the recent years, he is estimating the grades I could get. The calculations make him sometimes worried, sometimes joyous. (Wing, grade 12)	In this story, the child relives the experience—the father anticipates the result (the child glances back, the father looks forward).
Getting the results *The day the official grades will be announced arrives at last. Everyone in the family gets up very early, as if to welcome the New Year's Day. My heart is beating very fast, too afraid to face that grade. I suggest that Dad go. He seems also very nervous. Rubbing his hands, he says to me hesitatingly, "Perhaps it is better you go!" It is true. But sometimes we feel cowardly. With Mother's intervention, Father finally goes alone. Now there is the quiet waiting. The whole family sits together silently. We are all wondering how Father is at that moment: crestfallen with his head sunken, or delighted, dancing with his hands and feet. The sun passes over our heads. We all forget to have lunch. We don't have telephone, so we can*	Collecting the exam result requires courage: father has to have the courage (mother sends father).

only wait. The sun is setting now. Dad has not come back yet. I painfully lie on the bed, "It is all over! Dad does not dare to come home!" *"Bang", someone pushes the door heavily open. A gust of alcoholic smell reaches us. Father is completely drunk and beyond himself. "You made it! You made it!" he shouts.* *I am so lucky. And that year I am admitted to Hunan Normal University.* (Zhang, grade 12)	The family suffers in silence together. There is so much joy in knowing the positive result that the relief is almost unbearable—the father gets drunk with happiness (and from alcohol).
The pressure of silence *It is the evening before the grand examination day. I am reviewing the materials for the tests. Mom is in the living room, knitting a sweater and Dad is quietly reading the newspaper. I am sitting in front of my study desk, carefully reviewing all the things that I have learned. However, I cannot concentrate. Other days, it may not be noisy, but it is not as silent as today, which gives me a sense of pressure. When I think of the exams tomorrow, my heartbeat accelerates. In a place as quiet as this, I can even hear the sound of my own*	Silence itself becomes pressure (silence before the storm). Sometimes keeping studying is

heartbeat. Mom and Dad ask me to go to bed early so as to collect more energy for the next day, but I stay up until 11 studying. Of course, this extra time of review has little effect, but it seems that I get some comfort from it. (Sun, grade 10)	easier than trying to sleep (and experience the pressure of silence)—even though sleep (rest) is important before the exam.
The sound of pens writing *The noisy classroom suddenly quiets down when the teacher enters with the examination papers. All is quiet, so quiet that we could hear the sound of a needle falling to the ground. This is the examination room. This is the battlefield we are going to fight in. Here is the place that we show our academic achievements.* *I admire those students who are sitting straight. They are calm, very confident, a tinge of a smile lingering on their mouths, whereas my heart almost jumps out of my chest. How come that I cannot calm myself down?* *It is as if I see many eyes looking at me. Oh, they are my teachers, my mom and dad. They look like they are speaking to me: have*	(This story describes very sensitively the atmosphere of the test taking.)

confidence in yourself and try your best. Now I calm down a little bit, holding the pen up. This pen is the embodiment of adults' expectation. *"Dinging, dangling,…" the clear sound of bell is ringing, the horn for the dash blows. The classroom becomes even quieter. The sound of pens writing is all you can hear. Item One I finish very quickly. Then I finish the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Item Two. No 6. Gosh! I am stuck at this item. I don't know what to fill in the first blank. One minute, another minutes passes, I racked my brain, sweat dripping down from my forehead. I try very hard to recall what the teachers taught in class. Oh, I didn't listen carefully. It is my fault. Oh! Let's move to the next item. As I am about to try the next item, the door of my memory seems to open to reveal a tinge of light. Aha, that is it! I almost jump up. I proudly look around, and see everybody is wasting no time in finishing the test. Now I see, it is not yet the time to get excited, I blame myself. "The one who laughs last laughs the best," I tell myself not to be too proud…*	Test taking is unlike almost any other kind of educational experience. Students carry a lot of baggage (guilt, doubt, excitement, competitiveness, the pressure of time) into the exam. There may be positive and negative self-talk: self-blame, self-congratulatory moments, trying to maintain the calm throughout the exam, etc.

(Jiang, a grade 8)	
The air is so tense *"Lei, what is your score in math this term?"* *"Dad, I didn't get a good grade. In mathematics I have 90, in language, uh, I… have 76 points."* *"What?!" Before my sister finished speaking, Dad's demeanor has already changed such that I dare not look at it. The whole house is dead quiet. My sister nervously rubs her small hands. She looks down. I am not able to see her eyes, only the tears down her cheeks. I cannot bear to see my sister so sad. But I also know my Dad's temper. This is not the right time to defend my sister. The three of us stand there in the tiny square living space of our house. The air is so tense that I seem not be able to breathe.* (Qianqian, grade 7)	In this story, the child's educational experience is equated with the number of points or marks on an exam. The parent does not ask, "How was school today?" But, "How many marks did you bring home? There is a lot of emotional experience associated with exams and tests. Children may receive the anger and punishment of their parents in shame.
Daydream *In a blink, it is Sunday again. In elementary school Sundays are filled with just a*	

few homework assignments. But in the middle school, homework can pile up higher than me. For example, take the homework assigned to us for this weekend! The big essay, the small composition, copying English words, 20 math problems and three test papers to complete… these are all tedious and awfully boring…	Examination and exam oriented learning such as homework assignment is experienced as boring and tedious.
Gradually, I change into an exquisite, beautiful and genius homework machine. This homework machine works not only very fast, but also writes very beautifully. I observe my body curiously: it has a lot of switches. It is writing exactly as I usually do. No difference at all. What is most striking about it is that it can write very fast. A writing assignment only needs two minutes to finish. When it is time to go to school, I will be changed back into myself. Whenever I want to be changed back into the machine, I only need to say one word, "homework-machine." Then I become a homework machine.	Even the subconscious (of daydreaming) of the child is imbued with eagerness to get through the impossible task of the pile of homework and tests.
Ever since I became able to change myself into a homework machine, my	

assignments are very well done. I always receive compliments from all subject teachers. I feel very happy… I cannot help but shout aloud, "Dear homework machine, I love you!" *"What"? My dad looks at me strangely and asks, "Homework machine? What are you talking about?"* *Oh, I wake up with a startle. I was daydreaming just now. "Nothing, nothing, nothing,…" I respond quickly. Looking around, I notice that the sun is setting already… but I have only finished a small part of the homework assignments! What a day! I heave a sigh, if only I could turn myself into a homework machine now…* (Jiawei, grade 7)	The child is still a child: hoping for a fairytale solution (by becoming a magical machine) to complete the impossible homework tasks.
More marks *On August 30, the day I receive the result of the junior high graduation examinations, I feel my heart is bleeding.* *It takes me a huge amount of courage to tell the results to my mother. She changes into another person. Her smile disappears. She then*	By asking how other children can do what this child cannot do, the mother is not recognizing the child's perseverance and hard work.

asks me about the results of the other kids that I know. As I tell her, Mom starts blaming me: "They go to the same school just like you. How come that they can get more marks, and you cannot!" From that day, Mom watches me all the time, letting me do nothing but reading and writing. *On September 4, the day for senior high schools student registration, Mom reluctantly gives me the school tuition fees, "Other kids only need to pay 1200 yuan, but you need 3600 yuan. This is the punishment we receive for you not working hard."* *The first day, the teacher puts me in the last row in the classroom. One Wednesday evening, the teacher in charge calls me to her office and says to me, "Your Mom paid the school triple the money as the others to get you in. Do you know that? You must work harder. Although your junior high school graduation exam marks were bad, it does not mean that you need to get bad marks in the coming years. Though we know we should not judge students*	Success on school exams is not seen as a function, in part, of ability, but entirely of effort. (In this example there is a difference noticeable between western and eastern epistemology of learning. In western epistemology of learning success is associated with innate intelligence and ability, in Chinese epistemology of learning success is associated primarily in terms of effort.)

by marks only, the whole of society ask for marks. The universities also ask for marks. Remember that!" (Chunsheng, grade 10)	
Teacher praise *After the mid term examination, I go to the mathematics teacher's office to see how much I got for the math exam. I am so delighted when the teacher tells me the marks I received: 91. Although this was not the highest mark, only four students in the whole school in my grade achieved above 90.* *I feel very satisfied with my marks this time. On Monday morning class, the math teacher comes in with all smiles. He says, "Generally speaking, the examination results in the whole grade were not good. It shows that the math problems tested this time are very difficult. Even so, there are two in our class who made over 90! One is Wu Zhengxing, the other is Ma Dawei." Each of them will be awarded an elegant notebook." When I get the prize, my heart beats hard; I feel my face become red.*	The students who do well in the exam system seem to have positive experiences. But one wonders how healthy it is for a student to feel "elite" and "chosen."

Then the teacher continues, "Wu and Ma have been selected to participate in the Hope Cup, our National Mathematic Contest..." Hearing this, my heart beast even faster. I am so excited! *That night I cannot sleep for all the excitement. My head is full of thoughts: What if I can get an award in this national contest?! … I have a dream… In the dream, I see the math teacher. He is encouraging me, showing his support for me, asking me to calm down and have confidence in myself.* (Zijiang, grade 8)	The reward for doing well on the exam is the privilege of doing more and harder exams!
What is all this for? *The teacher rushes angrily into the classroom. The storm is coming. This is how we all feel during the short Monday class meeting before class starts.* *We all understand immediately what this means. The whole class quiets down. The teacher's eyes become blue, emitting two beams of light like swords, killing all the resistance we have – we all lower our heads,*	The teacher cares about good grades--but does the teacher care about the students? The student experiences a

waiting to be slain. *"Look at how terrible you all did on the exam!" Hearing his roaring voice, we all lower our heads further. He continues, "Our class is 'No. 1' from the bottom, the lowest rank again! Did you not study? None of you entered the first 10 of the whole grade. The average rate of passing students is so low! If things continue like this, how can you face the junior high graduation examinations? This must change! You are to tell your parents to come here this Sunday. I want to have a meeting with them."* *Another storm is looming. Such days feel like they will never end. I don't remember what the teacher says next…* *Such is our commission: study hard. But haven't we studied hard? What is all this for?* (Liqing, grade 11)	strong power control from his teacher. The teacher may feel that he or she is losing face when his or her students perform badly—the success of the students reflects on the quality of teaching. The important pedagogical question is raised by the student: what does it really mean to study? What is study? How is study meaningful and good for children?
I retook the exam *In June, 2001, I retook the junior high school examination. Mom seemed more scared*	The child worries about the mother worrying about him (and

than I was. Late that night, both Mom and I could not sleep. I know the exam means more to my Mom than to me. Early next morning, I was awakened by the noise of Mom moving about. I went to the window of my room and blame Mom for my sleepless night. Mom said nothing, and went into the kitchen. I followed her. Mom was frying eggs for me. She wept while I finished eating the eggs. *Meanwhile I have gone to the countryside and now I am back after two weeks of absence. As I enter the house, I see my mother's face is relaxed. I know then that I have been admitted to the key senior high school. I have never felt so relieved.* (Daqing, grade 9)	his exam performance)—and yet blames the mother for his discomfort. For some parents exams equate with stress, anxiety, and pain. How can children who are sensitive to their parents not feel tremendous pressure and guilt (or the relief of it)?
Pressure *The senior high school entrance examinations are the first turning point of my life. I know that I should give all that I have learned in the past a thorough review. However I find it really scary when the teacher warns us repeatedly in class, "Nowadays the SHS*	The child experience of learning is constantly equated with never-ending preparation for the next test and the next level.

entrance examination is more difficult than the University Entrance Examination. People used to say CEC exam is like a millions of soldiers passing over a single wood bridge. Now people say SHS exam is more like this. As long as you pass the SHS, one of your feet has already made it across the threshold of a university." I know he is trying to make us realize the importance of the exams we are facing now. But the pressure is too heavy for us to endure. *After the exams, before the results are announced, Mom's and Dad's mutterings jam our ears: "If you succeed, you must go. Even if we have to sell everything in our house, we will support you; if you do not succeed, then you go back home and do farming for the family. I don't have the money to buy you in." I am already very tired. This is yet another burden that presses me too much.* *The announcement letter is finally received. I should have been able to relax for a while, throwing the burden of exams and expectations into the Pacific for the moment. But*	For the parents, and therefore for the child, it is never enough.

no, Mom and Dad become talkative again to me: I should not be proud, I should work harder. Study more seriously and prepare for a key university. They have bought me yet another pile of complementary materials to augment the curriculum. I feel that the burden becomes even heavier than before. *How I wish that this time of my life was over.* (Xiaofei, grade 10)	There is no let-up, no resting--immediately one must take on more extra learning to gain advantages for doing better on the next test.
The experience of cheating in the exam *"Sha, sha..." The sound of sorting and handing out the exam papers. I am so nervous. My heart is beating very fast, pounding so loud as if it is about to jump out! This is a unit test. In this unit, there are many English words that I have not memorized yet. If they appear in the test... Oh my god! It would be like having a tasty candy, but you have to give it up if you have a toothache!* *I take the test papers from the teacher, while praying in my heart: God help me, not to meet any way-blocking tiger. Help me! I tried my*	Cheating, just like taking the exam, is scary. But some children feel they have no choice than to cheat if they want to do well.

best to calm down and control myself. I first do the easy questions. It goes well at the beginning. But then, I am stuck by the 20-mark filling-in-blanks-with-words item. My hands are trembling. I say to myself: do not be afraid. I put in a few words, and… I am thinking of the English textbook that is under the desk. It is so tempting. I need to get a good mark. My left hand starts to move around under the desk. Sweat drops roll off my forehead. I say to myself: do it. The teacher will not notice. Finally, I make up my mind. I am watching the teacher, and in the meanwhile, my left hand is flipping through the pages under the desk. I soon find the right page. The moment I lower my head and start reading, I hear the teacher's voice, "Zhanglong, hand your exam paper to me." I grow pale. It is like thunder on a fine day. All finished. I don't remember when my exam paper was confiscated. I do not come back to myself until quite a while later. (Xiaoling Chen, grade 7)	The right hand wants to do the test; the left hand wants to cheat. The child may experience an internal struggle. (Cheating on tests and exams is a common and widespread problem in China.)
Scared	

I was 11 years old. Our language arts teacher was "publicly-recognized" as an excellent teacher, because the students she taught before have done well in the examinations. But I did not know why. I did not like her at all. I remember one dark night--after two hours of self-study I was not allowed to leave class until very late because I did not get 100 points in the dictation test. I was instructed to copy every English word 10 times for punishment. I felt very bored in the language arts class, and now I felt it was more difficult to memorize these new words. That night, I went home at 10 pm. It was really a terrible experience for me to go home alone at ten o'clock in the pitch darkness of the night. This happened several years ago. Every time when I think of it, I feel scared again. (Xuemei, grade 7)	Students may experience that exams have scary or bad consequences. Punishment may be the consequence of doing poorly on a test and lead to other experiences that are traumatic in their own right—one punishment leads to other punishment.
Prodigy *My mom registered me in a writing training class. This is still my first time*	A child may feel great joy from an unexpected achievement—

participating in the extracurricular writing class. Unexpectedly, I received 94 on my first composition. The record so far is 96, only another two points and I will break the record. Ha, ha, ha… thinking about this, I feel very proud.	but the joy may quickly disappear.
Arriving home, I immediately report this good news to Mom. Mom is even more excited than I am, and says to me with all smiles, "My son! My effort is not in vain! You must have a superior intelligence. Yes, you are a prodigy!" Hearing this, I reply doubtfully, "Really?" "Yes, absolutely yes!" Mom says with complete confidence.	
Then, Mom says to me, "From now on, I don't want you to play with those children in the neighborhood." I protest immediately: "They are my best friends!"	Sometimes a child experiences punishment for doing well.
But Mom says, "When I say 'no' then it is no." And she continues, "From now on, you will read English for two hours, read books on composition for one hour. I want you to take reading notes, to do basic writing exercises, two pages every day.	The student experiences the strong power control from his parent.
I want you to	The child may experience the

write one composition…" Hearing this, I became very upset I rush to my room and cry. *I know, of course, that I have to listen to Mom's words. However, ever since she finds out that I am a "prodigy," she demands that I should get grades no less than 94, but also that I should try to get the highest grades in all other subjects. Therefore, every day from now on, I have to struggle with heavy assignments — assignments from teachers as well as from my Mom.* (Liangliang Lin, grade 7)	parent living vicariously through the child. Children who are set up as prodigies run the risk of experiencing a terrible fall when they cannot live up to the image projected onto them. The taste of (the child's prodigy) success seems to drive the mother to make pedagogically inappropriate decisions.
Don't play *Ever since grade 5, I have always been among the top three students in class in tests. I am used to standing on the platform receiving prizes from the teacher and the applause from my fellow schoolmates. The prizes range from storybooks, dictionaries to all sorts of stationery that a primary pupil may find useful. The prize presentations usually take place at the assembly before the lesson starts.*	The child experiences a dream (of becoming a famous ping-pong star) but the parent does not see what the child sees, or who the child really is and who and what the child wants to be.

This year, I come first in the class and the prize is quite bulky and heavy, and wrapped in fancy paper. It is old Chinese tradition not to unwrap prizes or gifts until you are home. As usual, I put the prize intact in my school bag. Honestly speaking, I must confess that I did try to feel it with my fingers to see what is inside. Judging from the edges and size, I am sure there are at least 2 big files. *After school, I walk home with light gallops. The first thing I do is to show my trophy to mom.* *"I came first in class this term." I hand over the prize and the school report.* *"Yes." She then unwraps the "parcel".* *Good gracious! There are two big files, a notebook, two or three pencils and, most appealing of all, a table-tennis bat. The bat is not the commonly seen one. It is rectangular, a yellow one.* *If I have this bat, I need not ask classmates to lend me theirs at recess. My bat is so special that every classmate will envy me*	The child is denied the possibility of experimenting with

and ask me to lend it to them. I will become their star in Ping Pong. I indulge in my dream while my eyes are fixed on the bat. *"Remember to work harder. Don't play." Mom says softly, returning all the stuff to me except the bat.* *From that time onwards, I've never seen the special bat again. I am still looking for the vanished bat.* (Jennifer, Hong Kong project)	different identities (becoming a famous ping-pong player) The child is "forced" to experience learning as work, not play.
Then he beats me *I remember the day when Miss Wong, my English teacher, was returning the dictation exams. It actually happened many times like this.* *"Liz!" Miss Wong says. I stand up, and walk slowly towards the teacher's desk. My heart beats fast. Miss Wong passes my dictation book to me. But I dare not open it. I am afraid that I do not have a good mark. Whenever I receive a failing mark my father gets angry and beats me. The passing mark of the dictation is 60. If I get a mark of 55, then he will hit me 5*	For this child, receiving a mark is anticipating the severity of physical punishment at home.

times–the difference between the passing mark and my mark.	
I breathe deeply, trying my best to keep calm. Then I turn over the first page. My heart sinks. My mark is only 40. Oh, my God, I have studied hard but my performance is so poor. Why? What is wrong with me? Panic comes over me. I try to hold back my tears. I do not want my classmates to notice that I am sobbing.	
Miss Wong tells me that I have to show my parents and have them sign the dictation book.	
When I get home, my parents are already there. I can feel my heart beating very fast again. I take out my dictation book and pass it to my father. He opens it and glares at me. Then, without saying a word, he takes out the long wooden ruler from his room.	(The teacher practices a common routine—of dubious pedagogical value.) The father feels that he is beating this child out of love, the child experiences the beating as not loving.
He stands in front of me and says, "I do not hit your right hand! You need it to do your homework. Open your left hand! 20 strokes!" He makes me open my left hand.	
And then he beats me.	(This kind of physical punishment is quite common

Tears pour down my face. (Christina, Hong Kong project)	amongst Chinese parents and their children.)
She finally made it *Jill was a quiet schoolgirl of 15 who lived in an apartment near us. She worked very hard to be one of the few "head girls" at school. But no matter how hard she tried, she just could not be the first in class.* *Her mom kept reminding her of how excellent her cousins had been doing and how her older brother had won first prizes. Actually, her academic performance was not bad. She was one of the top five in class over the past 3 years. However, her mom never praised her.* *One day before the exam results were released, Jill gave everything she had to her good friend, including a Barbie doll that she had had for years. She wrote to her Mom and Dad apologizing for failing to be the 'first in class'. She then put on her school uniform claiming that she was going back to school. However, she never reached school because she was found dead near her home on the same day. She plunged to*	This child never experiences praise and holds out success as an impossible goal: to become number one. The student experiences the pain of failing in the exams, but more noticeably from the feeling of losing face for the family and for the teacher.

her death from the top of the 32-storeyed building after slashing her wrist. *When her mom received Jill's report card, she found that Jill had achieved "first" in her class. She finally had made it.* (Lucy, Hong Kong project)	The child experiences suicide as preferable to not succeeding.
I feel that the door began to distance me from my mom and dad *After I entered junior high school, the pressures and tasks to study became much heavier than ever before. My spare time after school was almost all spent in front of my study desk. Mom and Dad showed their special care for me. In order to let me study quietly, and not be disturbed by the noise of the television, the door to the family room was closed all night. On the other side of the door my mom was knitting some sweater and Dad was watching TV programs, and then there was that soft light. Behind the door was me, surrounded by all the books scattered on my desk and my lonely desk lamp. Gradually, I learned not to go to Mom and Dad's room for a chat. Mom and Dad do not*	The child experiences the preparation for exams as isolation. Where some families are very involved in their children's preparing for the exam, other parents leave their children to experience isolation, lack of love and exclusion from family intimacy—for the sake of their hoped-for future success.

want me to come over to talk, not even for a bit, lest it would waste my precious time. I feel that door began to distance me from my mom and dad. *One night, I could not bear the loneliness any longer and went into my parents' room, hoping to feel the warmth of their affections. But I discovered that my parents' faces no longer bear smiles. I understood. I should go back to my study desk. I quietly went back to my own room. That door has been closed, keeping me from the soft light. I know nobody can talk with me freely. But, every night I still hope, hoping that door will open, hoping to see the soft light coming through the door.* (Yin Yin, grade 8)	The child experiences the door as a physical signifier of the family relationship.
Recognition *"Hush! Mrs. Leung is coming. She has got our exam papers!"* *All the girls fall back into place as Sandra, our sentry, whispers out her warnings. I have a feeling of excitement and tension. This is the moment that I have been waiting for, the return*	

of our first English exam paper in grade 9.	
Mrs. Leung starts to hand back the papers. It is her practice to rank order the students, and keep papers in the same mark range in bundles. First the papers with marks in the fifties go out, then the sixties, etc. We all keep our fingers crossed that our names will not be called too soon. Finally, we come to the nineties and there are only a few papers in the pile.	Students experience how competitive it is to receive recognition. It is significant that the less achieving students are buying into the process as well by accepting the way they are labeled and the connotations that go with them.
"Mary, well done," says Mrs. Leung. So, Mary who usually gets the top marks has been called. Next is Kim, who is always the apple of the teacher's eye. I try hard to conceal a secret smile of satisfaction.	
Finally, when my name is called, Mrs. Leung pauses and announces to the whole class, "I am really very impressed with Kathy's work. She is the only girl who got 100% correct on section II of the paper, the comprehension section. Well done Kathy!"	
All eyes are on me now.	
"Good work, Kathy!" "Congratulations!"	
I receive my paper amidst the clapping of	

hands. This is the moment I have been waiting for since the beginning of the year: the invisible, quiet little girl suddenly glows and becomes visible. The same happens year after year. At first teachers only notice the more vocal girls. For too long I feel that I have been ignored but now I have regained my rightful place among the "elites."	It is very special for a child to receive a superior recognition after not having been recognized for so long.
Then, alas! I see it: the answer to the third question, the 's' for the third person singular is missing from one of the verbs! My exam paper is not 100% correct! I am panic-stricken.	
I steal a glance at Diana sitting next to me. Has she noticed my mistake? All the girls are either busy checking their own marks or trying to argue for more with the teacher. My mind is a total blank.	Students are brought to experience themselves as elite.
"Now I have to collect your exam paper again. Please pass them up," says Mrs. Leung. *In the confusion, I pick up my pen and add a little 's' to fill in the missing bit.* (Chai Ling, Hong Kong project)	The student does not want to give back the "medal."
Now that student is number 1	

I don't remember much from my childhood but there is one event that I still distinctly remember from grade one. It has stayed with me all my life, for more than 40 years.	(This story is a "nice" example that shows how the testing and examination culture starts to build into a child's school life.)
It was the end of the school year and the teacher had handed out nice prizes for all the students who had done well that year. Many students received prizes and the teacher gave me a sweet stuffed bear. When I came home I showed the bear to my father and told him that the teacher had given it to me because I had done such fine work.	
But my father did not smile. He remained quiet. Then he said, "You received this prize because you are number 13." And he looked at me, and inquired softly, "Do you remember what student was the first one to get up? Now that student is number 1."	For the first time the child experiences not receiving, being denied, unconditional love and recognition from the parent.
I looked into my father's face and felt very strange. *From then on my prize was not sweet any longer. That day gave me a whole different understanding of school.*	The complexity of the testing and examination experiences may start very early in the school life of the child. School learning is to aim for No. 1, for

(Dong, Hong Kong project)	the best.
Caught in Cheating in the exam *I am taking the history exam in grade 9 but I feel that I haven't been well prepared for it.* *When I get the exam paper, I quickly scan all the question items. Great! Except for one question, all the others have been anticipated by me in my preparation for this exam. I feel very excited. "Don't rush. Do it one by one." I say to myself. Very soon, I finish all the choice items, filling blank items, map filling items. I heave a sigh of relief. Good! I should have more than 90 points this time. Now, I am going to do the QA items one by one. Now, the "Xingchou Treaty"! I can't remember its content well. I know the historical date of this event, but what is the exact content of the treaty?* *If I can answer this question correctly, then I can get 100 points. Wouldn't that be nice? But I cannot recall the content of the treaty… Suddenly, the thought of cheating occurs to me. I have never cheated before. Thinking of cheating makes me tremble. I have*	It is not uncommon to feel unprepared for an exam, even though one is prepared. A testwise student learns to anticipate examination questions. The student is experiencing testsmartness in the exam.

never done this before. I have always been a good student. What a shameful act it would be if I were caught! People would look down upon me. They might think that all my previous good achievements are all …. My thoughts are going wild. I constantly ask myself: shall I do it or not? I imitate the act of cheating; laying down my head on the desk, at the same time looking at the teacher. Thinking that only one question answered correctly will award me with 100 points, I am really reluctantly to give it up. *A moment later, the teacher seems inattentive. My chance has come! I quickly ask my deskmate Ming to pass the answer to me. In less than a second, I get the slip of paper with the answer. Excited and nervous, I cannot hold the pen firmly with my trembling hand. While copying the answer, I even have to copy word by word. I feel so nervous that I cannot even remember one word or one sentence. My palms, back and chest begin to sweat. There are still a few more words to copy. But the teacher sees it. I quickly throw the paper away. The teacher is*	Exams may tempt children into situations of experiencing moral stress and anxiety associated with cheating. The moral distress results from thinking of all bad consequences of cheating and getting caught. The experience of cheating can be complex and subtle in terms of inner doubts, anxieties, guilt feelings, and so forth.

coming towards me. Everything is lost. I am finished! My flushed hot face and hand make me really uneasy. I am caught! (Yijun, grade 7)	
Examination Moment *The exam today is mathematics, the subject I fear most.* *The first bell rings already. I am still outside the classroom, trying to rehearse the various formulas. Again and again I flip through the handbook and the past examination papers, all the while reciting silently those points that seem important. I am called in by the teacher. Seeing that all other students are so calm and confident, I feel ashamed of myself. Now I hear the teacher say, "Time to start." Like a starting shot in a race, everyone rushes to open the test book and start off.* *I've forgotten all my anxieties and I jump right into the test and start writing.* (Hairong, grade 10)	The experience of feeling ready for a test is very important. But can anyone ever experience feeling completely prepared for a test. Some students may never feel prepared (even though they may be better prepared than their peers who look confident). Taking an exam is a very private experience but it also experienced as a social event that has a certain atmosphere, etc.
Fairness *This is the first midterm exam since I*	

entered the junior high school. Just because it is the first, I treat it with all seriousness. I have prepared myself pretty thoroughly. When the exam papers are handed out, I quickly skim the whole paper and find that the questions are all within the scope of my review. In half an hour, I have finished the whole paper. I feel very happy. *I look around, and see that most of my classmates are still carefully working on their papers; except for a few students who are obviously copying each other's answers. They are cheating! No way, this is like robbery! I feel annoyed. They should not be able to get away with this. It is not fair to me and the others! I want to report them to our teacher. But, how can I do this?* *Just then, I hear the teacher say, "The student in seat 4 in row 2—keep your eyes on your own work. Don't ever think of cheating!" Oh no! he is looking at me. I immediately raise my hand and respond, "No it's not me. It is Chan Wei who is copying from his book under the desk." Teacher Zhang says, "Okay. Stop it.*	Exam taking may be an individualistic experience: the experience of separating oneself from others. Some students who experience much success on exams may feel superior to their peers. Students may experience being

That's enough. Chan Wei is doing fine! But you're looking around makes me suspicious that you are the one who wants to cheat." *Chan Wei stares at me with hatred.* (Wu You, grade 8)	set-up against their fellow students.
We should be honest, shouldn't we! *That was a language arts test. I was very confident that I should be one of the top three. However, when the announcements come out, the result was far from what I expected. When the exam paper was handed out, I checked the items one by one. And I found that there is one 10-point item that I should have done right. But why was I so careless? I blame myself. Strong vanity drives me to erase the wrong answer and replace it with the correct answer. Then I took the paper and showed it to the teacher with trembling hands. Seeing it, the teacher knew immediately what I had done, but he did not expose me. He responds as if he suddenly realizes something, "Oh… Perhaps I made a mistake. What does the old saying say again? Yes. 'If you did something wrong, then correct*	Some children may be mark-hungry. Here the teacher stills the hunger but also lets the student experience the (false) source of the hunger. (This teacher shows a nice sense of pedagogy!)

it.’ Right?” He then added 10 points to my paper, and said to me, “We should be honest, shouldn’t we?” The marks have been added; but the teacher’s comments make me uneasy for several days… In the end, I told the teacher what I had done … This little incident, perhaps in many people’s eye, is just a small thing. But for me, it changed me greatly. (Meixue, grade 9)	

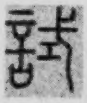
Chapter 6 Phenomenological Inquiry of the Lived Meanings of Students' Examination Experiences

In this chapter a phenomenological discussion will be attempted, using the thematic understandings gained from the previous chapter. It will show that the examination experiences are complex phenomena. Some meaning dimensions are strongly culturally embedded; other meaning dimensions may be more socially, individually, or existentially based.

Tracing the etymological origin of examination

It may be helpful, before actually looking into the lived meanings of students' examination experiences, that we consult the etymological meanings of the word "exam" and "test" in English and in Chinese. We find that some etymologies in English immediately evoke experiential sensibilities. The academic use of the term "test" and "testing" only dates from the early 20th century. In late Middle English the word "test" denoted a cupel used to treat gold or silver alloys or ore. From this usage derives the expression "to put to the test" and "to stand the test." The Latin *testu* and *testum* referred to earthen pot and *testa* meant shell or jug (Chantrell, 2002, p. 508). The word "examine" comes from the Latin *examinare* meaning to test, weigh. *Examin* referred to the tongue of a balance. Early uses from the 17th century of the word "examine" refer to "weigh accurately" by using a standard or rule that has a very strong quantitative nature. Examining knowledge has such early usages, to "weigh", to "measure" in terms of accountable quantity. (Chantrell, 2002, p. 187).The contemporary usage of examination is as a formal test; but sometimes the word exam and test are used interchangeably.

The Chinese word for examination is "考试". One may realize that this is the simplified writing style created since 1949. The Chinese traditional way of writing it is "考試", as in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Both of the two forms come from the original Chinese character that was written on Oracle:



It is a pictographic symbol. The left part looks like a soldier standing in a warriot dressed with armor; Holding in his hand in the right part of the pictorgraph is an ancient spear-shaped weapon called a "yue". Thus, "examination" originally means to "try" and to "compete" (See Shuowen Jiezhi, 1987, p.256). As described in Chapter 2 about the history of examination, we noticed that the ancient examination in China focused first on the "six arts" (rituals, music, archery, charioteering, literature, and mathematics) and later more on literary writing, Chinese calligraphy, painting, nature, geography, besides the Confucian classics. In addition, there was a different type of test, the "military test" that usually focused on the martial arts performance of various kinds.

Here we may sense that in ancient China, the major meaning of examination was to select, to try, and to compete. It was more like a government function of selecting officers using a series of literary and military criteria.

Test or exam in its modern form, however, has both the function of selection and assessment. Selection focuses on choosing according to a set of fixed criteria. Assessment has an intention of evaluating a person's progress or achievement. But the modern assessment is more of a summative rather than a formative nature. The strong technical sensibility of examination already conflicts with the original meaning of assessment and evaluation. While selection is a necessity for the society, the assessment is more of a quantitative nature. The nature of examination has changed drastically since the ending of the imperial examination system in late Qing Dynasty, when the feudal kingdom was defeated by the combined modern western powers. On the one hand, the meaning of the concept examination has become more technical; and on the other hand, it has a stronger intention to measure and weigh quantitatively the progress and academic achievement of a learner.

In both English and Chinese etymological explications of the meaning of terms "exam" and "test" in their original form, we realize that they are similar in that, in both languages, an exam has indicated a human basic interest in understanding things, quantitatively measuring knowledge and yet they are also different in that the English word has a focus on "weigh" and "measure", while the Chinese character has a strong sense of "selection through competition".

Examinations and tests are unique "educational" experiences

There are all kinds of teaching and learning going on in schools, but tests and exams seem to be special phenomena. We need to distinguish between the actual examination and testing moments and the broader contexts of school experiences that cannot really be separated from the exams. However, the moment of taking an exam seems to have qualities that are easily recognizable by students who are used to taking tests and exams. For example, the silence, the atmosphere of pressure, the sense of competitiveness, the self-talk, the possibility of cheating and the pressure of time, can all be aspects of the exam experience. This student seems to describe quite vividly the actual moment of sitting for an exam or test:

> *The noisy classroom suddenly quiets down when the teacher enters with the examination papers. All is quiet, so quiet that we could hear the sound of a needle falling to the ground. This is the examination room. This is the battlefield we are going to fight in. Here is the place that we show our academic achievements.*

I admire those students who are sitting straight. They are calm, very confident, a tinge of a smile lingering on their mouths, whereas my heart almost jumps out of my chest. How come that I cannot calm myself down?

It is as if I see many eyes looking at me. Oh, they are my teachers, my mom and dad. They look like they are speaking to me: have confidence in yourself and try your best. Now I calm down a little bit, holding the pen up. This pen is the embodiment of adults' expectation.

"Dinging, dangling,…" the clear sound of bell is ringing, the horn for the dash blows. The classroom becomes even quieter. The sound of pens writing is all you can hear. Item One I finish very quickly. Then I finish the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Item Two. No 6. Gosh! I am stuck at this item. I don't know what to fill in the first blank. One minute, another minutes passes, I racked my brain, sweat dripping down from my forehead. I try very hard to recall what the teachers taught in class. Oh, I didn't listen carefully. It is my fault. Oh! Let's move to the next item. As I am about to try the next item, the door of my memory seems to open to reveal a tinge of light. Aha, that is it! I almost jump up. I proudly look around, and see everybody is wasting no time in finishing the test. Now I see, it is not yet the time to get excited, I blame myself. "The one who laughs last laughs the best," I tell myself not to be too proud…

(Jiang, grade 8)

This experiential account is written by Jiang, a grade 8 Chinese student. Taking an exam is a very individualistic experience but it can be also experienced as a social event that has a certain atmosphere. Note how Jiang describes the pressure and expectation from adults, the way of handling each of the test items, the self-talk. All these shows that the actual moment of test taking has its unique features that is different from all the other educational experiences in schools.

It is not uncommon for the student to feel unprepared for some exam, even though he or she is prepared:

> *I am taking the history exam in grade 9 but I feel that I haven't been well prepared for it.*
>
> *When I get the exam paper, I quickly scan all the question items. Great! Except for one question, all the others have been anticipated by me in my preparation for this exam. I feel very excited. "Don't rush. Do it one by one." I say to myself. Very soon, I finish all the choice items, filling blank items, map filling items. I heave a sigh of relief. Good! I should have more than 90 points this time.*
>
> (Yijun, grade 7)

Yijun long learned to anticipate examination questions. Not unlike him, many students may also experience the test smartness in the exams and tests.

Some test wise students express the experience of the exam as an intellectual combat between the examiner and the examinee. One is trying to win over the other. Students may experience exams in a warlike mood: days of hard battle and torture.

> *The examination takes three days. And three days of hard battle finally come to an end. When we leave the examination hall, we sense the freedom and expanse of the outside world. Some students cry from sheer relief.*
>
> (Wing, grade 8)

In exam driven schools, students are "asked" to experience their relative worth

In exam driven schools students experience a certain reality, and this reality has a certain atmosphere. Exams and tests seem ever present. Life in classrooms that are test and exam driven acquires an atmosphere of competitiveness, comparing oneself favorably or unfavorably with others. This atmosphere sponsors a certain language with a vocabulary containing terms such as elite, mediocre, top, ordinary, low-grade, high-grade, inferior, and superior. This language has consequences for students to understand themselves in certain ways. As a student, I may grow up with the "knowledge" that I am low-grade:

> *I am a "low-grade" student, a real, authentic low-grade student. I am the staircase for high-grade students; I am the scapegoat for good students to excuse themselves for decreasing grades, the laughing stock for my classmates, the nail in teachers' eyes, the worries of my parents' heart…*
>
> (Xiaoqiang, grade 11)

The way that the teacher addresses a particular student at any moment of a lesson can be experienced by the student as determining or reflecting his or her worth and value in the class. In other words, everything the teacher does (every word, gesture, glance, action) can be "read" by the student as if he or she is receiving the outcome of a test. This language mediates for students a sense of self-identity. So, evaluation takes place even in non-test, non-examination situations. In the teacher's remarks, posture, tone of voice, facial gesture, etc. are contained evaluative judgments and qualities that may cut deep into a student's sense of self.

> *He reprimands me sternly, "What are you doing?! Walking here and there and disturbing your classmates?! If you don't want to study, then get out of the classroom!"*
>
> (Xiaoqiang, grade 11)

Here we see that a student is being considered in the teacher's language as dispensable. He is not valued as a person in his own right. In other words, for some students this evaluative experience may be positive, for others it may be very negative. Linling says,

> *When a good student asks the teacher whether a math problem has a simpler solution, the teacher praises him for his deep questioning. But the same math problem, the same question from a low-grade student, and the same teacher comments with a mocking tone, "you are splitting hairs; don't expect to walk up to the sky with one step!" When a high grade student wins a race in track and field, the teacher praises him for his intelligence, morality and physicality; whereas when the same race is won by a low grader, the teacher says you "only know how to play, but don't know how to focus your energy on your study." When high grade and lower-grade students make the same mistakes, the teacher reprimands the lower-grade students first, until it makes the student's face turn red or cry. Teachers are more generous to the high-grade, like Hao. If he is late for school, the teacher says with a light comment, "Come early next time, Hao." But if I, a lower-grade student, come late, the teacher will not listen though I may have a good excuse. He won't even mention my name. He will not listen; the punishment may be to stand outside the classroom for the whole period.*
>
> (Linling, grade 11)

For Linling, the evaluative climate during lessons seems to have created privileged and nonprivileged "classes" in the class.

In exam driven schools, tests and exams are not just discrete events

In China, tests and examinations dominate school life and the student's mental life. Students experience the exams in their anticipations while they are at home, or when they go to bed, or when they look for friends on the way to school. The child's experience of learning is constantly equated with never-ending preparation for the next test and the next level:

> *The announcement letter is finally received. I should have been able to relax for a while, throwing the burden of exams and expectations into the Pacific for the moment. But no, Mom and Dad become talkative again to me: I should not be proud, I should work harder. Study more seriously and prepare for a key university. They have bought me yet another pile of complementary materials to augment the curriculum. I feel that the burden becomes even heavier than before.*
>
> *How I wish that this time of my life was over.*
>
> (Xiaofei, grade 10)

Examinations do not just last a few hours. When the spell of exam is over, the pressures and preoccupations remain. It is difficult to relax after exams that have such high stakes. And, thus, an anxiety-ridden exam experience may be prolonged for many more hours after the exam is officially finished.

So, examination life is never ending and the sense of exam is ever present. For the parents, and therefore for the child, it is never enough. There is no let-up, no resting--immediately one must take on more extra learning to gain advantages for doing better on the next test. For example, for Dawei the reward for doing well on the exam is the privilege for doing more and harder exams:

> *On Monday morning class, the math teacher comes in with all smiles. He says, "Generally speaking, the examination results in the whole grade were not good. It shows that the math problems tested this time are very difficult. Even so, there are two in our class who made over 90! One is Wu Zhengxing, the other is Ma Dawei." Each of them will be awarded an elegant notebook." When I get the prize, my heart beats fast; I feel my face become red. Then the teacher continues, "Wu and Ma have been selected to participate in the Hope Cup, our National Mathematic Contest..." Hearing this, my heart beat even faster. I am so excited!*
>
> (Zijiang, grade 8)

In China, examinations may be experienced as family events or affairs

Taking an exam is a family experience in Chinese culture. In comparison, in Canada many parents may not have a clue whether or when their children take important tests and exams. Examinations are like very significant events in which many Chinese parents take a detailed, very serious inquisitive interest.

> *The school playground is packed with people. It seems there are more parents than students. Every examination center has made available an emergency room. Exam takers need it. Their parents also need it. Standing under the scorching sun for several hours, our parents are really amazing…*
>
> *Eventually, students begin to exit the examination room. Parents mill around, asking this and asking that. My Beida (Beijing University) dream shattered, I walk out of the classroom. I feel numb. In the distance, my father is walking towards me. I rush into his arms and cry.*
>
> (Qing, grade 12)

On the one hand, examinations that children must take may bring them closer to their parents who may experience extreme concern and worry about their child's health as well as the child's performance. On the other hand, relational tensions are growing among the family members. Parents and grand parents become worried as the exam event approaches. They care for the child, but they also produce even more pressure on their child with the meticulous care and well-meaning worries. Xiao Li, one of the interviewees, describes the days before the national college entrance examinations:

> *Day and night, the whole family is mired in a tense atmosphere. No one appears anxious but everyone can feel the air is heavier with time passing. Father tries to tell jokes at the table and others laugh. But at the end of the laugh, a silence begins to bite into the bones. Mother cooks as many dishes as she can in the kitchen. I know they are trying to make me happy and relaxed. Mum makes many good dishes but I have no appetite. Anxiety lingers on.*
>
> (Chen Gang, grade 12)

Family care and pressure is not only limited to the few days before and after the exam and test events. It actually starts in their child's everyday school life. For example, when school day is over, Chinese parents will typically ask, "Did you get any homework home?" "Any exams today?" Students have to deal not only with the turmoil of exams but they have to remember details on which they will have to report. The parent does not ask, "How was school today?" But, "How many marks did you bring home?

> *"Lei, what is your score in math this term?"*

> *"Dad, I didn't get a good grade. In mathematics I have 90, in language, uh, I… have 76 points."*
>
> (Qianqian, grade 7)

At home, children may be treated as prize entries into a competitive race. For some parents and grandparents, the exams the students are going to take are promising opportunities to bring the family glory and pride.

> *I have become the special person in my family. I do not need to do anything except study. For the first time, my parents quarrel about my diet. Dad thinks that I should eat mainly meat so as to add more nutrition; Mom insists that I should eat more vegetables to maintain a clear head. The quarreling goes on and on. So Dad manages to get a whole bunch of books, and finally they reach an agreement: during the examination preparation period, eat mainly meat, and during examination taking period, eat mostly vegetables. I often see my fragile grandma fold her hands in front of her chest, muttering some words. I know, she is praying for me. In her family, there have not been any university students so far. Naturally, she hopes that her eldest grandson can finally fulfill this goal and earn the family the glory.*
>
> (Ding, grade 12)

The child is treated with special care. But this kind of specialness can also be experienced as burden for the child.

Furthermore, test and exam events may be experienced by school staff as a school teacher event. The teacher's honor is also at stake. The teacher may feel that he or she is losing face when his or her students perform badly - the success of the students reflects on the quality of teaching. After all, how well students perform on tests is closely related to how well teachers teach to the test. So, when a large provincial or national standardized test is held, teachers are usually present before and after the exam, making sure their students are ready to take exams, and helping students to estimate what score they may get. When the scores of the class are published, the teacher may feel "very shameful" and may have a sense of "losing face".

Liqing recalls the moment in the class when the teacher brings a storm of reprimands to the whole class:

> *"Look at how terrible you all did on the exam!" Hearing his roaring voice, we all lower our heads further. He continues, "Our class is 'No. 1' from the bottom, the lowest rank again! Did you not study? None of you entered the first 10 of the whole grade. The average rate of passing students is so low!*
>
> (Liqing, grade 11)

This teacher constantly compares his class with the other classes.

Examinations and tests are strongly emotion laden experiences

There is much emotional turmoil associated with exams and tests. Students may carry a lot of baggage (guilt, doubt, excitement, pressure) into the exam. There may be positive and negative self-talk: self-blame, self-congratulatory moments, trying to maintain calm throughout the exam, etc.

But also, the enterprise of being tested and examined is associated sometimes with very strong emotions and feelings. A child may feel great joy from an unexpected achievement—but the joy may quickly disappear. For example, children who are set up as prodigies run the risk of experiencing a terrible fall when they cannot live up to the superior image projected onto them. The following is what Liangliang remembers his first writing exam experience:

> *My mom registered me in a writing training class. This is still my first time participating in the extracurricular writing class. Unexpectedly, I received 94 on my first composition. The record so far is 96, only another two points and I will break the record. Ha, ha, ha… thinking about this, I feel very proud.*
>
> *Arriving home, I immediately report this good news to Mom. Mom is even more excited than I am, and says to me with all smiles, "My son!*

My effort is not in vain! You must have a superior intelligence. Yes, you are a prodigy!" Hearing this, I reply doubtfully, "Really?" "Yes, absolutely yes!" Mom says with complete confidence.

Then, Mom says to me, "From now on, I don't want you to play with those children in the neighborhood." I protest immediately: "They are my best friends!" But Mom says, "When I say 'no' then it is no." And she continues, "From now on, you will read English for two hours, read books on composition for one hour. I want you to take reading notes, to do basic writing exercises, two pages every day. I want you to write one composition..." Hearing this, I became very upset. I rush to my room and cry. I know, of course, that I have to listen to Mom's words. However, ever since she finds out that I am a "prodigy," she demands that I should get grades no less than 94, but also that I should try to get the highest grades in all other subjects. Therefore, every day from now on, I have to struggle with heavy assignments — assignments from teachers as well as from my Mom.

(Liangliang Lin, grade 7)

The taste of success seems to drive this mother to make pedagogically inappropriate decisions. For Liangliang, the experience of doing well becomes a source for punishment: more tedious assignments and no more play.

Students may experience that exams have scary or bad consequences. Punishment is a common consequence of doing poorly on a test and may lead to other experiences that are traumatic in their own right—one punishment leads to other punishments. Children may receive the anger and punishment of their parents in shame. For students, exams equate with stress, anxiety, and pain.

> *Whenever I receive a failing mark my father gets angry and beats me. The passing mark of the dictation is 60. If I get a mark of 55, then he will hit me 5 times--the difference between the passing mark and my mark.*
>
> *I breathe deeply, trying my best to keep calm. Then I turn over the first page. My heart sinks. My mark is only 40. Oh, my God, I have studied hard but my performance is so poor. Why? What is wrong with me? Panic comes over me. I try to hold back my tears. I do not want my classmates to notice that I am sobbing.*
>
> *Miss Wong tells me that I have to show my parents and have them sign the dictation book.*
>
> *When I get home, my parents are already there. I can feel my heart beating very fast again. I take out my dictation book and pass it to my father. He opens it and glares at me. Then, without saying a word, he takes out the long wooden ruler from his room.*

> *He stands in front of me and says, "I do not hit your right hand! You need it to do your homework. Open your left hand! 20 strokes!" He makes me open my left hand.*
>
> *And then he beats me.*
>
> (Christina, Hong Kong project)

Out of such physical punishment and mental suffering that is expected from adults for not doing well, students may experience a tremendous amount of anxiety and pressure in exams that may not be very helpful at all in achieving better results. In another anecdote, Jill is able to get high marks, but her parents never praised her and are never satisfied with the result. "Why can't you get No. 1 for just once? Look at your cousin. He always gets No. 1!" So, the exam can be experienced as a strong sense of failure and disappointments that may even make life no longer endurable and livable. Jill killed herself after one exam, thinking that she disappointed her parents again.

The prospect of examinations places great burdens on children in terms of family expectations. For the child the family's pride and honor are at stake. One interviewee says:

> *My father once told me that I gave him a lot of "face" because of my good performance in school… I think, as a factory worker, he did not have too much pride in his job – it's not the kind of job a man could gain*

> *respect for, and my father was a proud man – but because of me, he received a lot of praise from others – this made him walk proudly.*
>
> (Liu Bing, grade 11)

Getting good grades can "bring glory to the family". In this sense, studying and achieving well in exams is not so much for the child as for the family.

Exams may be experienced as number

Chinese students become very sensitive about number, the grade and standing they receive. They care so much about the number that sometimes teachers from other countries may feel quite overwhelmed by this sensitivity. One Canadian teacher comments that in her class, she notices that Asian children are very meticulous about the grades they receive for their reports, assignments, projects, and tests. "After receiving the test papers or assignments back, these students will check the answers and calculate carefully to see if there is any possible miscalculation by the teacher. If there is, the student will not hesitate to report to the teacher and ask for a correction." Comparatively, other students may be more accepting of the test outcome and less concerned about trying to negotiate an extra point or half point.

In a test driven school culture, examination marks, points, and numbers become full of meaning to the students. An examination mark, in the parents' and teachers' eyes, tells the whole story of student learning in school and shows the measurement of school achievement. And for the student a number may be experienced and viewed as a representation of what he or she "is" and the status in the class:

> *If you are falling behind in the rank, the teachers will blame you, Mom and Dad will blame you. Classmates will laugh at you, too. I remember that when I finally received the test result, I felt numbed. I wept… I got the 15th in that midterm exam, and was moved from the first row to the fourth row in the class. I feel I am only a number, nothing more or less. Since then, I start to hate exams, hate it all through…*
>
> (Yan, grade 10)

Here Yan experiences a strong anxiety about her grading number. In exam or test driven schooling, students may identify his or her self-worth with a number; but the number is unstable: it may go up or down. And so the student's sense of self-identity is fragile dependent on the number game. It affects how people look at the student. The social and class status of the student changes when the exam result changes. Yan seems to experience the self as a number instead of a person.

Grades on exams may seem arbitrary or chance occurrences. It may seem that mere chance strongly shapes one's identity, decides one's worth, and determines one's fate.

> *I silently go through the textbooks, checking every uncertainty that I may have about my memory of the test. The strange thing is that I cannot find any mistake that I could have made. Could it be that my exam paper was graded wrong? But I had already asked and the teacher told me that she has checked it. Is it possible that they counted it wrong? How I wish it was true!*
>
> *Mom asked me last night about the exam results. But I was evasive. I stubbornly think that there is still hope that my grade could be changed. After all, I know that I am a superior student.*
>
> (Haibin, grade 10)

A grade on a test can profoundly shake one's sense of self and self-worth. Haibin experiences an internal struggle when receiving the low marks. He is concerned that he will no longer be considered as a superior student. Of course, he is reluctant to accept a number that will change his status downward.

An examination outcome (number) may also have financial value attached to it. Losing one point in an exam may mean more money for entering a prestigious high school. Therefore, number in exams may be experienced as money:

> *Mom reluctantly gives me the school tuition fees on the registration day, "Other children only need to pay 1200 yuan, but you need 3600 yuan. This is the punishment we receive for you not working hard."*
>
> *The first day, the teacher puts me in the last row in the classroom. One Wednesday evening, the teacher in charge calls me to her office and says to me, "Your Mom paid the school triple the money as the others to get you in. Do you know that? You must work harder. Although your junior high school graduation exam marks were bad, it does not mean that you need to get bad marks in the coming years. Though we know we should not judge students by marks only, the whole of society ask for marks. The universities also ask for marks. Remember that!"*
>
> (Chunsheng, grade 10)

The mere number in exams and tests may also mean corporeal punishment. Physical punishment is scary for the student. Mental punishment is even more serious. So, not uncommonly, children may feel forced to change the number on an examination paper, hoping that this could avoid the punishment from the parents. One interviewee recalls:

> *One time I changed my mark on the unit test examination. I had a 71. This is a very low mark according to my Dad's standard. I was so scared that he would beat him again. On the way home, I constantly looked at the paper, and thought what I should do. All of sudden, such idea came into my mind. Change the number on the paper! The number 7 can be changed into 9. If you do not look at the number carefully, you won't be able to see the changes. So, finally, with my trembling hands, I changed the number from 71 to 91. That is the only time that I did this. And I avoided the punishment from Dad.*
>
> (Yaowu, grade 8)

So, every mark counts. The following is another thought-provoking case told by a school counselor:

> *I have encountered a hurtful case. The child was only 9 years old when he came to see me. He is smart and lovable, eloquent. I noticed that he suffers from OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder). Nine of his fingers have been bitten badly. I guess this is what happens as I heard the story from his mother.*
>
> *The child's school achievement has always been among top students. He often gets No. 1 in school exams. But his parents hope that besides this, he should also aim at 100 marks on all the subjects. Otherwise, he will be beaten. This is therefore, producing a huge amount of pressure*

> *for him.*
>
> *Every time when exam date is approaching, he feels much anxiety. He often prays, "God. Help me. Let me get 100 marks. I don't want to be beaten..."*
>
> *Get 100 marks on every subject. How difficult it is! Gradually, the fear before the monthly exams develops. One week before the monthly exams, he starts to bite his fingers, to ease his worries.*
>
> (Chang, school counselor)

So much about exams and tests seems to have to do with numbers. An examination number may mean a family glory and pride, a (mis)recognition of one's self-identity, objectification of the student into an object. Sometimes, in the extreme case, the examination number can mean life and death.

Exams may tempt children into cheating

Cheating, just like taking the exam, is scary. But some children feel they have no choice but to cheat if they want to appear to do well.

> *"Sha, sha..." The sound of sorting and handing out the exam papers. I am so nervous. My heart is beating very fast, pounding so loud as if it is about to jump out! This is a unit test. In this unit, there are many English words that I have not memorized yet. If they appear in the test...*
>
> (Xiaoling chen, grade 7)

The student feels that he is not well prepared for the exam. In fact, nobody will feel well prepared. So, when such test items appear, the student starts to worry and the cheating is so tempting.

> *But then, I am stuck by the 20-mark filling-in-blanks-with-words item. My hands are trembling. I say to myself: do not be afraid. I put in a few words, and... I am thinking of the English textbook that is under the desk. It is so tempting. I need to get a good mark. My left hand starts to move around under the desk. Sweat drops roll off my forehead. I say to myself: do it. The teacher will not notice. Finally, I make up my mind. I am watching the teacher, and in the meanwhile, my left hand is flipping through the pages under the desk. I soon find the right page. The moment I lower my head and start reading, I hear the teacher's voice, "Zhanglong, hand your exam paper to me." I grow pale. It is like thunder on a fine day. All finished. I don't remember when my exam paper was confiscated. I do not come back to myself until quite a while later.*
>
> (Xiaoling chen, grade 7)

The child may experience an intense internal struggle. The right hand wants to do the test while the left hand wants to cheat. The experience of cheating can be complex and subtle in terms of inner doubts, anxieties, guilt feelings, and so forth. Yijun writes:

> *Thinking of cheating makes me tremble. I have never done this before. I have always been a good student. What a shameful act it would be if I were caught! People would look down upon me. They might think that all my previous good achievements are all .... My thoughts are going wild. I constantly ask myself: shall I do it or not? I imitate the act of cheating: laying down my head on the desk, at the same time looking at the teacher. Thinking that only one question answered correctly will award me with 100 points, I am really reluctant to give it up.*
>
> (Yijun, grade 7)

Exams may tempt children into situations of experiencing moral stress and anxiety associated with cheating. "Cheating has become a fact of school life," some western scholars say (Cizek, 1999). Cheating has become a very common, very important and pervasive educational problem and presents a real challenge to Chinese educators and policy makers. Recently, the Ministry of Education in China requires that every student sign the "Honest Agreement" before they take the National Entrance Examinations. It is an indication of the seriousness of this problem. In several rich provinces examination rooms have been equipped with advanced monitoring systems.

Plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration and cheating on exams—sometimes by ingenious methods—are predictable responses by some students facing high academic pressure. The higher the stakes and stiffer the competition, the more temptation and incentive students have to cheat.

The exam carries the significance of parental and teacher expectations

One interviewee says:

> *I hate studying so much, but to get to college, to make my parents happy, to achieve higher social standing, I had to do it… I remember in my third year when I was studying the most boring Politic Sciences, I hated it, I tore up the book, I smeared it with ink… but after the tantrum, I had to give myself up to the fate and pick it up again and study….*
>
> (Wang Hao, grade 12)

Sometimes the expectations are impossible to live up to as in the Hong Kong Newspaper story:

> *Jill was a quiet schoolgirl of 15 who lived in an apartment near us. She worked very hard to be one of the few "head girls" at school. But no matter how hard she tried, she just could not be the first in class.*
>
> *Her mom kept reminding her of how excellent her cousins had been doing and how her older brother had won first prizes. Actually, her*

> *academic performance was not bad. She was one of the top five in class over the past 3 years. However, her mom never praised her.*
>
> *One day before the exam results were released, Jill gave everything she had to her good friend, including a Barbie doll that she had had for years. She wrote to her Mom and Dad apologizing for failing to be the 'first in class'. She then put on her school uniform claiming that she was going back to school. However, she never reached school because she was found dead near her home on the same day. She plunged to her death from the top of the 32-storeyed building after slashing her wrist.*
>
> (Lucy, Hong Kong project)

Of course, not all children will experience the expectations as so traumatic as in Jill's story. But nevertheless, these expectations may be a heavy burden for the child. The child may experience the parent living vicariously through the child. The child may feel that what all she aims to fulfill is what her parents have designed for her. For example, parents may want their child to become a lawyer, physician, etc.

Students may experience test smartness

In actual test or exam moment, students may experience test-wiseness and exam-smartness. As Yijun describes his examination moment:

> *When I get the exam paper, I quickly scan all the question items. Great! Except for one question, all the others have been anticipated by me in my preparation for this exam. I feel very excited. "Don't rush. Do it one by one." I say to myself. Very soon, I finish all the choice items, filling blank items, map filling items. I heave a sigh of relief. Good! I should have more than 90 points this time. Now, I am going to do the QA items one by one.*
>
> (Yijun, grade 7)

In the actual moment of taking the exam, the student learns to finish the test items quickly. Students tend to develop a test-smart move in dealing with the test: scan all the items, do the easiest first, then gradually do the difficult ones. When encountering a difficult item, bypass it for the moment and do the others first. Test smartness also reflects in what Yijun says ("Great! Except for one question, all the others have been *anticipated* by me in my preparation for this exam."). Guessing and anticipating is a common strategy used by students. The students may feel delighted when all the test items have been within the rehearsal, preparation, or review. Test and exam driven learning environments may develop students' test smartness and test wiseness in preparing for, and taking the test.

> *What occupied my mind in those school days, was grades, exams, how to get perfect scores, how to be on top of the class, or even of the*

> *grade… I pursue perfection in my grades and exam results. If I missed some points or lost to someone, I felt very bad… Because I always stayed until the last minute, and I asked myself to get the perfect grades, this added up tremendous pressure on myself.*
>
> (Zhang Li, grade 11)

Test or exam driven schools sponsor a certain exam mood or atmosphere that invites students and teachers to always think in terms of exams: how to prepare the exams, how to take the exams, even how to estimate and calculate exam results, and so on and so forth.

Exam oriented learning may be experienced as monotonous and tedious

In examination driven schools, much learning is oriented towards good examination outcomes and test performance. Teachers repetitively lecture and drill the same content, over and over again. Then heaps of homework assignments are given to students to reinforce the things learned in schools. Jiawei writes:

> *In a blink, it is Sunday again. In elementary school Sundays are filled with just a few homework assignments. But in the middle school, homework can pile up higher than me. For example, take the homework*

> *assigned to us for this weekend! The big essay, the small composition, copying English words, 20 math problems and three test papers to complete… these are all tedious and awfully boring…*
>
> (Jiawei, grade 7)

One of the interviewees says:

> *I have no Sunday: It is just the "seventh day of the week". Many students spend their weekends in the library. Others carry books or English language cards with them in the toilet and in the streetcar or bus. The period of reviewing for the examination is even worse. Due to excessive tension, the students constantly suffer from headaches, fatigue, insomnia and neurasthenia, and such symptoms become worse daily. It is not unusual for them to talk in their sleep or recite articles or themes. There is a general loss of appetite, accompanied by weight reduction in the case of most of the students. What is more serious is that there are instances of fainting in the dinning room, library or even in the examination hall.*
>
> (Pan liping, grade 12)

School life of students is filled with rote memorization, lesson drilling, preview and reviewing, and a huge amount of homework assignments. These dull and repetitive learning activities affect students' mental health as well as their physical health.

This student experiences the classroom teaching as dry and dull:

> *Classroom teaching consists mostly of the teacher reading his lecture notes and the students taking them down like recording machines. Some students, after attending a two-period class, have to spend more than that much time to verify and supplement their notes. The teacher relies on his notes to teach. In practical teaching, the teacher emphasizes note-taking.*
>
> (Xie Gang, grade 12)

In test driven schools, students may experience a sense of guilt when they are playing. This is a predicament that exam oriented learning tends to create. The child experience of learning is constantly equated with never-ending cycle of studying for the next test and the next level. From a very young age, sometimes as early as in kindergarten, children are forced to experience that schooling is to compete, to aim for No. 1. The following is a teacher's memory:

> *It was the end of the school year and the teacher had handed out nice prizes for all the students who had done well that year. Many students*

> *received prizes and the teacher gave me a sweet stuffed bear. When I came home I showed the bear to my father and told him that the teacher had given it to me because I had done such fine work.*
>
> *But my father did not smile. He remained quiet. Then he said, "You received this prize because you are number 13." And he looked at me, and inquired softly, "Do you remember what student was the first one to get up? Now that student is number 1."*
>
> *I looked into my father's face and felt very strange.*
>
> *From then on my prize was not sweet any longer. That day gave me a whole different understanding of school.*
>
> (Dong, Hong Kong project)

What does this little incident mean for the child? Father does not love me unconditionally. School is to compete and strive for No.1 to gain an approving eye from the parent!

Children are also forced to experience that learning is work, not play.

> *After school, I walk home with light gallops. The first thing I do is to show my trophy to mom. "I came first in class this term." I hand over the prize and the school report. "Yes." She then unwraps the "parcel".*
>
> *Good gracious! There are two big files, a notebook, two or three pencils and, most appealing of all, a table-tennis bat. The bat is not the*

> *commonly seen one. It is rectangular, a yellow one. If I have this bat, I need not ask classmates to lend me theirs at recess. My bat is so special that every classmate will envy me and ask me to lend it to them. I will become their star in Ping Pong. I indulge in my dream while my eyes are fixed on the bat.*
>
> *"Remember to work harder. Don't play." Mom says softly, returning all the stuff tome except the bat.*
>
> *From that time onwards, I've never seen the special bat again. I am still looking for the vanished bat.*
>
> (Jennifer, Hong Kong project)

Little Jennifer experiences a dream of becoming a famous ping-pong star. But the parent does not see what she sees for herself; the parent does not see who the child "really is" and who and what the child wants to be. The child is denied the possibility of experimenting with different identities, such as becoming a famous ping-pong player in the above story.

Life in exam oriented classroom may be experienced as being marginalized

In test driven education systems, students may not experience the warmth and friendship of others. Rather, what the child experiences is the hard and cruel competition from the others, the fear that "If you win, I will lose" prevails. Once entering the middle school, some students may notice that the harmonious relationship among them disappears. Instead, there is more suspicion and guarding against each other: some students with good scores become reluctant to answer questions from the classmates about course problems, or pretending to say that he/she does not know the answer or don't have time to answer it.... Some students deliberately show no attention or appear casual about their study, but when alone in the evening at home, he/she will work very hard. Some students boast to others that they played this game or the other, or watched a good TV, etc., but actually he studied very hard till very late at night. Some even hide or throw away his classmates' books or materials, hoping to set up some blocks to his class competitors.

The fear that "if you win, I lose" is demonstrated to its extreme in the following descriptions by one parent, who overheard a short conversation between a parent and her son on bus:

> *The other day in a bus, I heard a short conversation between a mother and a son, which makes me feel quite sad. The boy told his mother that just before the exam, his desk mate asked him about a math problem. He pretended that he didn't know how to solve the problem but actually he did know. It happened that the math problem appeared in the exam. The boy said to his mother, "He (his deskmate) must not have solved*

> *the problem in the exam. So, this time, my marks will surely be higher than his."*
>
> (Jin, a parent)

The child feels a sense of triumph over his classmate's bad luck. And this type of feeling is not uncommon in the students' experience in test-oriented classrooms as well.

> *(I am eliminated from the elite class) With tears smarting my eyes, I pick up my schoolbag and the piles of my reference materials, exercise collections and test papers from my desk. At this moment, how I wish that somebody would come to give me some comfort and encouragement. Even just a word! However, when I raise my head, what I see makes me even sadder: some students are celebrating their stay by drawing a cross on their chest, murmuring "Thank God. You saved me in this class." Some, rubbing their bottle-bottom like eyeglass lenses, make preparations for the next class. And, those Olympic Test winners: they are still holding the thick books, studying the questions only college students will start to learn. — The whole class seems indifferent.*
>
> (Pan Ting, grade 12)

Pan Ting was removed from the elite class because she could not keep up with her test performance this time. She feels that she was being "put away" on the outside, being marginalized.

Chapter 7 The Pedagogical Significance of Students' Examination Experiences

Chapter 6 focuses on the experiential meanings of examination and test events in student lives; Chapter 7 aims at pedagogically discussing the phenomenological interpretations of chapter 6. Pedagogy challenges us to come to terms with the question of what is in the students' best interest. Pedagogy asks us to distinguish what is good from what is less good (or bad) about our actions and educational practices. So, within the context of this chapter, the main question borne in mind is, "What do the phenomenological meanings of examination experiences suggest for us in how to act pedagogically in our everyday dealings with students in schools?" and "What pedagogical advice could we glean that would be of use for teachers, teacher educators, parents, school administrators, and policy makers?"

Against the backdrop of the phenomenological interpretations of Chapter 6, the themes of study vs. play, self-identity, face sensitivity, and the question of how to deal with exams more reflectively and tactfully, have been discerned for further pedagogical discussions.

Study and play

"From now on, keep on working harder, don't play." This was the response of Jennifer's mother to her good performance when Jennifer got the first in her class and returning home with her trophy. Moreover, her mother "confiscated" the table tennis bat that the girl likes most among the prizes she was awarded by the school. Such response from parents and teachers are common in China. The parent always urges the child to try harder and harder: to work more and to play less, or better not to play at all. Such parents and teachers do not consider the pedagogical value of play in the child's learning and growing up.

In the test oriented Chinese society, students are influenced strongly by an atmosphere where everything seems to be directed towards good test results and exam performance. Anything that is not related to or is likely to affect examination result will be considered useless, impractical and not worthwhile. Exam and test culture creates a clear-cut dichotomy between *study* and *play*. Study is considered a virtue, whereas play, a bad conduct for a student. So, it is not a surprise that Chinese student is studying as hard as Jie describes:

> *I studied every day – at least five or six hours, including Sunday, holidays – no exception. I do not have the luxury of play. At that time, I was just so driven by my desire to become the top one. My parents asked me to go to bed early, but I always stayed up late. But because other classmates who competed with me all did the same thing, I did*

> *not feel too bad or too strange, you know, it was the way for every good student.*
>
> (Jie, grade 12)

In Jie's eye, study means preparing for good exam marks. Students are induced to think that study means to work hard, to understand what the teachers teach from the prescribed curriculum and memorize, through a tedious and tremendous amount of exercises and drilling. Study, as the parents and teachers suggest in some of the stories, is definitely not play. Play is considered a waste of time and has nothing to do with the activities required to perform on exams, and therefore the activities of play are seen to be worthless.

There is, of course, a large body of knowledge and literature in developmental psychology that indicates that play is actually an important part of the child's and student's learning process. For example, Piaget (1962) describes the developmental components of play and identified three types of play, each of which is characteristic of a stage in the development of the child: sensorimotor play, symbolic or representational play, games with rules. Bruner (1972, 1976) views play as a means for acquiring knowledge of environment and experience with the child's world. Knowledge and experience acquired through play develops and maximizes the ability to act with flexibility. Play can produce the imaginative flexibility that makes tool use, invention, and creativity possible. De Castell (2003) argues that learning and play are intertwined processes: learning occurs in play and vice versa.

So, play can promote learning and it is an activity that children engage in for its own intrinsic joy and value. Nonetheless, in a test-driven context, pedagogically uninformed and insensitive teachers and parents tend not to see the value of play in the child learning and growing up. What they think is best for the child is to study ever harder and ever longer for ever better exam results. However, these are not just personal pedagogies that are at work: noticeable in this emphasis on effort to ensure academic achievement is the eastern epistemology of learning suggesting that learning success is primarily associated with hard work and efforts (in contrast, western epistemology of views learning success as a function of intelligence and ability). Such epistemological assumptions about the effectiveness and value of work and effort echo easily in the Chinese proverbs and sayings: "With diligence, you can grind an iron bar into a needle;" "Practice makes perfect;" "Jade requires chiseling before becoming a gem;" "Learning is like rowing upstream, not to advance is to drop back;" "Slow birds should start flying early to catch up with others;" etc. As a consequence of this thinking, teachers and parents supplement the student with a huge amount of (often boring and repetitive) exercises and homework to reinforce and augment what they learn in schools. They do this perhaps in good pedagogical faith: to give the student a competitive advantage and to keep the student away from playtime.

Teachers and parents who are pedagogically thoughtful may be more inclined to consider the significance of play in children's lives and learning. In concrete circumstances such as in the story of Jennifer, the teacher or parent should at least ponder as to how to deal with such situations where there is a tension between play and learn. Obviously, when children only want to play, it may not be pedagogically the best thing for the future of the child. Teachers will warn the child, "No, no, you should not play at the moment." But sometimes, when the child is working at something and the work gradually becomes a joyful play, teachers and parents should be able to see that in transforming learning into play, it may become a powerful experience for the child, as well. So, the question, the teachers and parents here need to ask constantly in specific situations is, "what is this child experiencing at this moment?" and "what could be done to help make the child's experience more conducive to his or her full development for the present and for the future of this child?"

Reading a novel, writing poems, scrutinizing historical documents, contemplating Plato, analyzing a painting, solving equations, observing microorganisms--these could and should be a pleasure and joy of learning, and they are when carried out outside the test driven curriculum in leisure at our own pace to satisfy the child's personal interest and own curiosity.

Self identity

Life in classrooms that are test and exam driven tends to become infused with an atmosphere of pressing competitiveness, inviting students to compare themselves favorably or unfavorably with others. This atmosphere sponsors a certain language with a vocabulary containing terms such as elite, mediocre, top, ordinary, low-grade, high-grade, inferior, and superior. This vocabulary has consequences for students to understand themselves in certain ways. As the anecdotes in Chapter 5 show, for example, the student may grow up with the "knowledge" that I am a "low-grader", I am a "superior" or I am a "prodigy". In test and examination contexts, exams and exam oriented education becomes the sole media for the student to develop a sense of self-knowledge. Teachers and parents should wonder how this type of self-identity development may be very limiting and constraining.

Young people who constantly are forced to think of themselves in terms and categories that are associated with tests and exams, therefore are in danger of developing a one-sided sense of self. Self-identity is a complex notion, but it cannot be something that is finished--rather it is the difference we sense in being who we are and in not-being who we are, it is the openness created in the recognition of the difference of oneself from the other with whom we live and identify. And if self-identity is the realization of the tension between the being of self and the becoming of self, the understanding of self and the reinterpretation of self, then this realization is impoverished and shallow if it is performed largely in terms of marks, grades, numbers and competitive standing.

Exam driven education discourages students to experiment with other identity possibilities. The student may dream to be a badminton player, but the exam system may not encourage this genuine interest of the child to even have a try. In Jennifer's story, her mother fails to see what the child sees and does not recognize what the child wants to be. By taking away the special table tennis bat, Jennifer's mother is denying the child an opportunity. Ostensibly, the child can only shape her identity through performances on exams.

Wang Hao says,

> *I hate studying so much, but to get to college, to make my parents happy, to achieve higher social standing, I had to do it… I remember in my third year of senior high when I was studying the most boring Politic Sciences, I hated it, I tore up the book, I smeared it with ink… but after the tantrum, I had to give myself up to the fate and pick it up again and study….*
>
> (Wang Hao, grade 12)

To Wang Hao, studying for exams implies a strong denial of self-identity. Somehow he sees no other way out but compromise with his imposed "fate".

In another case, Deng feels inferior among his elite peers. Deng used to be a top student and after graduation from Junior High, he was admitted into the elite senior high school in the city. He describes,

> *At that time, I became quite zibei (feeling inferior, lacking confidence) – because everyone is so outstanding. In that elite school, I just see too many excellent students, who come from good families, smart, talented, with good character… With these models, I feel so inferior. I am no longer somebody!*
>
> (Deng, grade 10)

The competitive atmosphere makes the student come to a self-knowledge of being "inferior". The question raised here is, "Is this experience good for the child's well being?" Chinese parents and teachers may argue that it is good for this child in this situation, because it makes him realize his weakness and then strengthen it so he can achieve more: strengthen the student's weakness for better exam achievement! A pedagogically thoughtful teacher or parent may wonder, however, and challenge this view by asking, "How healthy is it for the child's identity development to submit the child so rigorously to exams?" A pedagogically sensitive teacher would be aware that exams constitute a very limited way of shaping the child's sense of self and would try to provide other opportunities when the child does not perform well in one area.

Social pressures, other people's comments, praise or blame on the students' examination marks, may also profoundly shape or shatter the child's sense of selfhood. For example, Chinese parents and neighbors in the same community usually talk about the children in their gathering, comparing this child with that child, saying that "this" child in this family has a bright future, etc. But what does this mean for "that" child? Paul Ricoeur (1987, 1990) argues that, because selfhood is something that must be achieved and something dependent upon the regard, words and actions of others, as well as chancy material conditions, one can fail to achieve a sense of selfhood, or one's sense of who one is can fall apart. The narrative coherence of one's life can be lost, and with that loss comes the inability to regard oneself as the worthy subject of a good life; in other words, the loss of self-esteem.

In a strong competitive culture, it may be not possible for a person to experience explicitly the sense of self and individualism, to try a life of one's own, for the happiness of one's own, to have a space of one's own. In China, entering a university has been the major route for students to be successful in their future career. The students do not have much choice about their life besides studying and preparing for universities. But, of course, the majority of students will not be able to go to university. And while aiming for studying in universities, students who are accepted still do not have much chance to choose their favorite area, because all these have to be determined by the grades, by how many apply for the area. So, those who have passed the entrance requirements (and this is already very hard), do not want to lose the opportunity of getting admitted. In the end they may accept any area that is offered by the Admission Office. So, this route to success is an imposed one instead of by personal choice.

In the Chinese culture, self is easily sacrificed for the benefit of the collective, for example, for the family's honor and "face", for the class, for the school, and so on. The influence of the exam culture on the self is profound. Some scholars doubt that it is possible for young people to develop a clearly delineated sense of self in the exam and test driven education system of China (Bailey, 1990). So, again, a pedagogically sensitive teacher or parent in China will have to be aware of the cultural influence as a whole to the student's selfhood formation, while at the same time, constantly challenges him or herself and questions the validity of the cultural influence in the concrete situations by asking, for example, "Does the exam and exam atmosphere shape the student and child's self-identify to his or her best interest?"

In discussing the nature of the teacher-student relation, the German philosopher Nohl suggests that teachers should always be oriented in a double intentional direction: "by caring for a child as he or she is, and by caring for a child for what he or she may become" (1982, pp. 135, 136). Obviously, the whole enterprise of testing and examining students is fraught with contradictions: we want the best future for our students and yet we do not want to sacrifice the present life of the student totally for this future. A pedagogically sensitive teacher needs to see the tension of this double intentionality between the student's present and future, and act towards to the best interest of the child, even though the question of what is in the child's best interest is always an open one and should be regarded with great caution by educators. The point is, however, that the best interest of the child should always be part of the pedagogical conversation among parents and teachers and among children and those who care for them.

Face sensitivity

In Chinese culture, students may experience exam and test events as an opportunity to gain face or lose face, or to add or diminish the family glory. Sometimes, achieving good exam results may be experienced not so much an honor and face for the student him or herself as for the family, for the teacher, for the school or even for the country. Recognition in examination may mean, "adding honor" and "gaining face" for the family. This experience is very cultural to Chinese and is deeply embedded into the Chinese traditional history that strongly promotes the collective "family" value. This can be seen through the daily use of the Chinese words, such as "gong jia" meaning public family, and "guo jia" meaning the nation family, "shi jia" meaning private family, "da jia" meaning a family for all. Family is considered the core of the social life. To a Chinese, doing something may not just mean doing something for oneself, it also means doing it for the "family".

The notion of "face" is central to Chinese collective culture. The word "face" has now come into common usage in English, having acquired a meaning in English that approximates what the character *mianzi* (face) means to the Chinese. English speakers use the phrase "saving somebody's face" to mean the act of arranging a delicate social situation in such a manner that any negative critique of somebody is muted. "Losing face" means, "to be humiliated by the exposure of one's weaknesses." "*Mianzi*" or "face" refers to the sense of psychological and social well being that comes from the public recognition of one's merits and virtues (Schoenhals, 1993, p. 68). Failure in examinations could have a severe consequence, such as losing face for the family and the school. Students feel so publicly hurt and humiliated because people consider that it demonstrates their incompetence.

So, sometimes, wanting to get high marks in examinations comes from not a real interest in learning, but rather a desire to protect oneself or one's family from public dishonor. Loss of face is, thus, fundamentally an emotional reaction of a person who has failed to live up to others' expectations. A student can cause loss of face for others. For example, if the student fails a university exam, then s/he might experience that s/he has caused the parents to lose face *(diu fumude lian)*.

Face sensitivity is a common phenomenon in many cultures, since it relates to one's self respect (*zizunxin*), or self esteem (Schoenhals, 1993, p. 68). So, while it is a common feature in many societies, it is even more prominent in Chinese culture. "Face" is a metaphor, as is generally understood, for self esteem. But in China, it further refers to the honor and respect of the "family" including the complexity of meanings that the notion of family carries. So, to understand the student's examination experience, the significance of "face" is one of the important dimensions that need to be taken into consideration. A student who passes the college entrance examination wins glory for him- or herself. But he or she wins even more glory *(zheng guang)* for his or her school, his or her teachers, and his or her parents. Diligent students will often say that their motive for studying was to repay the efforts their parents had put into raising them by passing the college entrance examination, thereby winning glory for their parents and teachers.

Holding a superior accountable for his inferior's performance is a tradition of long standing in China. Many Chinese traditional sayings reflect the fact that a child or student must be nurtured to greatness, so that if he fails to become great, it is the fault of his father or teacher. The famous *Three Character Classic* includes the following: "A father is in the wrong if he gives birth to a son but doesn't teach him, and a teacher is lazy if he is not strict with his student" *(Yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo. Jiao bu yan, shi zhi duo)*; and, "Famous teachers give rise to good students" *(Ming shi chu goo tu);* as well as, "When those above behave unworthily, those below will do the same" *(Shang liang bu zheng, xia liang wa).*

A son will study hard in order to earn honor for his father.

> *My father was a worker. I felt that he was mistreated and looked down upon in his job. I told myself I had to study hard, to get into a good school, them my father could "raise his head" among his colleagues.*
>
> (Jiahua, grade 11)

A successful student, in order to avoid arousing his classmates' jealousy and avoid being seen as one trying to put himself in the limelight, may attribute his success to the efforts of his teacher and parents.

Zhu Jia describes,

> *When I graduated from elementary school, Mum and Dad hoped that I could pass the municipal entrance examination and enrolled in a key junior high school, but I ended up in a second-class school. When junior high school years were over, Mum and Dad hoped that I could enter a key senior high school, but again I ended up in a mediocre one. Since I was young, I always let my parents down. Every time I heard my parents*

> *sighed, "Hai, Why can not my daughter earn me some honor…" I was twisted with pain.*
>
> (Zhu Jia, grade 10)

The student experiences the pain of failing in the exams, but more noticeably from the feeling of losing face for the family and for the teacher. The emotion and the sense of failure that result in the loss of family face may be so disastrous that life may be no longer endurable. Jill may have ended her life by plunging to her death from a high rise, because she felt so strongly being responsible for the loss of face of her parents in her failure to rank first.

In short, face and exam events are two important aspects of the Chinese social life; Chinese people usually relate one with the other. A pedagogically thoughtful teacher or parent may actually challenge the culturally rooted notion of face: Are we pedagogically responsible when we submit the student to exam, simply for gaining some "face" or "honor" for us? What does it really mean for the child or student to win glory or "face" for the school, for the teacher, for the family?

Examination and assessment practice in classrooms

The students' experiential stories pose another very important pedagogical question, "What does examination and test as a type of assessment do to the student's healthy development? How should assessment be conducted for the good of the child and student?" The question may be too general, but it may guide us in understanding the pedagogical meanings of student exam experiences.

Indeed, in every moment of school and classroom, we are constantly assessing and evaluating the students, both consciously and unconsciously.

> *"Good morning, class. I have just completed marking your recent assignments. Oh, I did enjoy marking them. Some of the writings were tremendous. The excellent grammar and the information in some of the writings pleased me tremendously. However I did come across the odd few that disappointed me, the grammar in those few was atrocious, and the information was incorrect."*
> *Mr. Li paused as his eyes fell upon me. His cold dark eyes were focused directly at me. They were like a heavy weight pushing down on my chest. I couldn't turn away. Crannies began to appear around his mouth as he smiled wickedly at me. I felt a cold shiver go up my spine. I became agitated. I shifted in my seat trying to avoid his piercing eyes. I turned away, however I could still feel the presence of his eyes close in on me.*
> *"As I was just saying, class, I have completed marking your assignments and it is my privilege to hand them back." He then moved through the row of seats like a predator eying each and every student, before returning the assignments.*

> *As Mr. Li approached my desk, my whole body froze. He laid down my paper on my desk, and eyed me like he had the others. However he spoke to me in a harsh tone. "Your work was incomplete; your grammar was atrocious, while your information was incorrect. I could have mistaken your paper for Grade one writing."*
>
> *My face turned red. I quickly covered my face in my hands. There were a few meek laughs behind me, however I told them quickly to shut up.*
>
> *It was rather apparent that my writings didn't please Mr. Li. However there was no reason for him to humiliate me in front of all my classmates. I was so ashamed. I hated that man.*
>
> (Liping, grade 7)

This story recalls a trivial and ordinary classroom moment that is recognizable in every classroom. But even a trivial moment in a classroom contains rich and often subtle evaluative experiences for students. A small praise, a little blame, a certain posture, a hostile look, a comment with a sarcastic tone… In all these tiny things that the teacher does or says, he or she is already giving the students "marks", a subtle or not so subtle evaluation! Insensitive teachers, give little thought as to how this could affect a student's growth. Severe consequences of our daily heedless assessing practice would include such responses from the student, "I do not like the class any more," "I hate the teacher for ever," "I do not like the subject," "I feel that I am a dumb student,"…

It is pedagogically significant that small things can have consequences for the child's whole life and leave a lasting imprint on their sense of self.

Exam and test driven education tend to promote a strong type of summative evaluative language. Teachers tend to use words such as excellent, bad, low grader, top student, talented, inferior and superior. The classroom and school life is permeated with a grading tone. The function of final and entrance tests and exams is obviously trying to gain a summative assessment of students' learning performance in terms of examination results or labeling the student with numbers. Grades in this case seem impersonal. Being graded on a test can be experienced therefore as degrading, an assault on our sense of self. A thoughtful teacher will question this kind of summative practice and be more attuned to the student and pose the evaluation statement in a more formative way and conducive the child's learning progress.

To assess a child's educational growth is a very challenging endeavor. It requires not only the knowledge of assessment "tools", it also requires thoughtfulness. "Thoughtfulness is a special kind of knowledge" (van Manen, 1986, p. 8). Thoughtful teachers will ask, "What could I have done to make it a better experience for the student?" "Who and what is this child becoming?" What are this child's possibilities?" and so forth. Of course, praising students blindly and indiscriminately may not always be good for them either. The point here is that a tactful teacher will have to ask him- or herself the appropriate pedagogical question and feel the tension of evaluation and act accordingly.

Developing a sensitive and thoughtful pedagogy of examination

Phenomenological pedagogy is a systematic inquiry into student's existential and experiential dimensions of their life world, aiming for a better understanding of student's individual being. It is an existential pedagogy, aiming to develop a pedagogical reflectivity and thoughtfulness of teachers, parents and other child education related professionals to act for the good being of students. Pedagogy, as van Manen defines it, is "the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations" (van Manen, 1997, p. 2). Exam as the major assessment practice and as one part of the important educational experiences in schools are such pedagogical situations, because testing and examining requires a form of pedagogical acting that "constantly distinguishes what is appropriate from what is less appropriate in the dealing with our children" (van Manen, 1991, p. 60). The pedagogy of exams is, therefore, as my research project's major goal, to bring the student's lived experiences into awareness, to bring about the discussion of the pedagogical implications of these experiential meanings and cultivate a pedagogical thoughtfulness and sensitivity in teachers, parents, childcare workers, educational administrators, policy makers and other education related adults in their everyday living and interacting with young children, particularly in test-related situations.

A. Maintaining an experiential orientation to student's test and exam events by remembering and writing practice

It is shocking to realize that through the present research project that how little we actually know about Chinese students' experience of examinations and how rarely we as adults (parents, educators, teachers, administrators, policy makers, health workers) seriously reflect upon these experiences and think about the pedagogical implications of our educational practices. As the teacher is expected to treat the job of teaching more and more technically, the teacher is less and less able to reflect upon the meaning, purpose, and significance of the educational experiences of students whom the school and the curriculum are supposed to serve.

Children are not simply anonymous objects to be taught, trimmed off, or molded, nor are they empty vessels to be filled with so-called knowledge. Rather, they are children with names and unique personalities who live in particular environments with other people. These are the children with whom we, as parents, teachers, and doctors live in our everyday lives, to whom or for whom we are required to do something. As adults, we are always standing in a certain relation to the students. In our daily living and dealing with young children and students, we constantly encounter situations where an action from the adult is expected. This is of no exception in the examination and test situations and in the circumstance surrounding exams and tests.

To become pedagogically thoughtful through the process of understanding children, we need to be reflective and sensitive. Throughout the efforts to understand students in an examination context, the researcher also needs to understand himself or herself and his or her own relationships with the children.

In doing this research and in collecting the experiential accounts, stories, and anecdotes about tests and assessment, I often encounter moments in pedagogical situations where thoughtful pedagogical action is expected from the teacher or other adults. From the anecdotes that I have collected, we can see that students are very sensitive to the test results, especially how people around him/her (including teachers, parents, classmates and friends) respond to the test results. However, most of the teachers and parents in the student stories appear insensitive and tactless in handling the pedagogical moments with the student. A careful observation may notice those minor changes in the student. A little blame or praise may make a great difference! It is really sad and surprising to notice that in many cases, teachers and even parents often pay little attention to children's experience. Why? Perhaps, we seem very often take the situations like these for granted and we think we have seen too much and know our students well. We seldom really pause ourselves to authentically tune ourselves in to students' experiential dimensions.

A thoughtful pedagogy of examination thus needs to cultivate the teachers' sensitivity and thoughtfulness in dealing with situations related to these examination and assessment situations. To become pedagogically thoughtful through the process of understanding children, we need to be reflective and sensitive. There are at least three ways in which teachers and any other adults that are related to the education of young students can do to understand what examination experience can be like for a child.

First, we can recall from our own personal childhood experience since almost all of us experienced at some time of our lives tests and examinations. However, we should be aware that children nowadays may experience examination situations differently. Second, we can listen to the experiences of others to develop our own sensitivity of examination situations. However, we should also be aware that others may have different experiences, some negative and some positive. Third, we can observe and get to know our students' experiences in various ways, including student writings and through our everyday dealings with them. But we also should realize that students may hide their experience for fear that it may reflect negatively on the way the teacher sees them. So, there is a danger of making convenient judgments here. And thus the question how teachers learn to reflect upon the nature and consequences of exam experiences by their students should also call our caution. Keeping these concerns foremost in mind may get us closer to the experiential reality and make better reflections possible. As a whole, we should always keep an open mind and attune ourselves to students' experiences and maintain certain pedagogical sensitivity. Tact, as van Manen states, "shows itself as openness to the child's experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 169).

These acts of remembering and sharing of experiences through various sources are the important channels of obtaining the research data for this research and they can open up new opportunities for students, teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, other child education related professionals to reflect on these experiences and discuss their possible pedagogical implications and significances. The anecdotal descriptions also provide opportunity for reflections about pedagogical questions and cultural dimensions of examinations in China schools and society. Teachers, students and other participants can benefit from an increased awareness of the historical background, the economic functions and the cultural nature of examinations in China. It is in the context of an awareness of such cultural traditions and present day global pressures that teachers (and the education related professionals) may gain a more thoughtful pedagogical perspectives on examinations and an understanding of the direction in which schools should move with regards to the issue in the examination system.

B. Awareness of the cultural experience

We should be aware that some of the stories in this dissertation are existential, while others are highly cultural and deeply rooted in the Chinese traditional culture. It would appear that many of the stories in this study show negative aspects of the examination system and its excessive pressures on students and their teachers. We understand that there could also be stories that tell the brighter side of the affair, for example, how students and teachers can occasionally turn their tests and examinations into something positive, something that promotes growth on both sides. As one of my interviewees says:

> *I am the type of person very fit to live under the examination system. It provided me a motivation to study, and gave me a direction to go, otherwise I think I wouldn't know what to do. The exam did not place too much pressure on me. Instead, it served as a guiding force for me to study regularly and even gladly. I like tests and examinations; they gave me a sense of achievements. You know how much you learned by seeing your test results… I usually made effective study plans to follow the test schedule, and felt very fulfilled and satisfied when I reached the goal of my plan…*
>
> (Jianguo, grade 12)

We would agree that a certain level and kind of pressure might not only be necessary but also desirable for spurring young people on to achieve what they want to achieve. Yet, from a pedagogical point of view, it can be argued that there are values embedded in our conventional practices that allow adults to ignore the multi-dimensional feelings (pressure, sense of failure, anxiety, depression, and so on) and quality of students' lived experience, and turn a deaf ear to their problems and difficulties.

C. Pedagogical tact and its implications for educational practice

When discussing the pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness in tests and test related situations and its implications for educational practice, we need to be aware that pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness is preconditioned by the care, the strong desire and willingness to turn to the lifeworld of the student and student's experiences (van Manen, 1990). With this strong intent and orientation, the teacher is able to identify with, or at least be more cautious and tactful in understanding what the situation is like for the child and then comes the next important part of the process, that is, the teacher will act in response to the pedagogical situation, in the sense of readiness to take appropriate action when and as necessary. The following incident shows a nice example of pedagogical tact practiced by the teacher:

> *That was a language arts test. I was very confident that I should be in the first three. However, when the announcements come out, the result was far from what I expected. When the exam paper was handed out, I*

> *checked the items one by one. And Alas! I found that there is one 10-point item I should have done right. But why was I so careless? I blame myself in my mind. Strong vanity drives me to erase the wrong answer and replace it with the correct answer. Then I took the paper and showed it to the teacher with trembling hands. When reading it, Mr. Li seemed to be thinking something. Then he said all of sudden, as if he suddenly found out something, "Oh… Perhaps I made a mistake. What does the old saying say again? Yah. 'A good person must correct his mistake when he found it.' Right?" He then added 10 points to my paper, and said to me, "We should be honest, shan't we?"*
>
> *The marks have been added, but the teacher's comments make me uneasy for quite several days… In the end, I told the teacher what I did that day…*
>
> (Meixue, grade 9)

Some children like Meixue may be mark-hungry. Here the teacher stills the hunger but also lets the student experience the (false) source of the hunger. The teacher demonstrates a fine sense of tact. He has tactfully changed a contingent classroom situation into a pedagogical moment and makes it meaningful for the students. Such tactful act of teachers makes a life moment a powerful experience for the student and leaves a lasting imprint on the student.

Stories like this are very good sources for teachers to reflect upon. It may not tell other teachers what to do next time when they are in similar situations, but through reflecting upon the lived experiences like this, teachers may hopefully become more open, sensitive and thoughtful in the actual dealing with students.

Should or would the teacher act the same way as Meixue's teacher? Of course not. It all depends, perhaps, for example, on the student's personality, on the teacher-student relationship, on the time and place. "Tactful action is always immediate, situational, contingent, improvisational" (van Manen, 1991a, p. 123); and as Martin Buber says,

> *In spite of all similarities every living situation has, like a newborn child, a new face, that has never been before and will never come again. It demands of you a reaction which cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you.*
>
> (Buber, 1961)

So, the classroom is every changing, dynamic, every moment is different from another and tact is characterized by moral intuitiveness: a tactful teacher seems to have the ability of instantly sensing what is the right or good thing to do. Through reflective practice, we may become more sensitive and thoughtful in our actions.

Meixue is now a teacher herself and in recalling the story he says,

> *Although this incident happened some time ago, I still can remember that particular moment clearly, so clear as if it just happened. It may seem to be a minor thing to some people, but it really changed me and influenced me. Reflecting upon this incident makes me more sensitive now in my own teaching practice.*

By orienting ourselves to the students' experiences and constantly reflecting upon them, we may somehow develop a type of pedagogical tact and sensitivity that will enable us to act more thoughtfully and tactfully in a specific moment. Unlike any scientific techniques or instructional technology, this type of knowledge is embodied and enacted in an unpredicted ways. "It can not be planned or predicted" (van Manen, 1991, p. 144). However, one thing is somehow certain that we will be more sensitive and tactful.

"Pedagogical tact requires tactful sensitivity toward the child's subjective states, an interpretive intelligence, a moral intuitiveness, and improvisational resoluteness in dealing with young people" (van Manen, 1991 p. 124). In test or test driven situations the tactful teacher would be sensitive to signs that the student is uncomfortable in a possibly harmful way and be directed by their understanding of the student's feelings to take appropriate action. The teacher would remember the range of feelings that the student or students could be having: dread, boredom, frustration, sense of failure, lack of confidence, humiliation, losing face, jealousy, depression, fear, guilt, anxiety, isolation, exposure, panic, pressure, temptation, terror, embarrassment, aggression, disappointment, misery, pain, rejection, nervousness, threat and so on. In the stories of this dissertation many of the teachers involved seem insensitive to the pedagogical moments and thus may cause a deep harm to the students.

In China, we commonly hear people say, "Examination is the powerful weapon that the teacher has to control the students" (kaoshi shi laoshi de wuqi). Another saying echoes the same idea from the student's perspective, "marks are the students' only hope for survival" (fenshu shi xuesheng de minggen). Students are constantly experiencing failures. During the never-ending exams, only a few students experience temporary success. On the one hand, the test driven educational system tends to make the teachers accustomed to the frequency of examinations and focus their curriculum on examinations. The examination becomes the "stick in the conductor's hand" ("zhihuibang") to guide curriculum and classroom teaching. On the other hand, teachers tend to forget to reflect upon what examinations really mean: to themselves when they were children and to the students in their current classrooms. They usually take it for granted that to study for better grades is a taken-for-granted goal and for sure is a good thing to do. With such assumptions, Chinese teachers seldom, if ever, question the validity of examinations and their impact on students. By remembering their own childhood stories and reflecting upon the students' experiences on examinations, it is hoped that teachers could develop a tactful sensitivity in dealing with students in constantly changing context.

By writing their own reminiscences from their own childhood, many of the teachers who participated in this study acknowledge that they become more aware or conscious of what it is like for the students in their own classes. As Mr. Zhang said:

> *To me, it's really a very new experience to write an anecdote about an examination experience from my childhood. When I was asked to write such anecdote, I was a bit worried because I don't like writing. After all, being a teacher I don't have much time to sit down and write.*
>
> *To my surprise, when I actually sat down and start to recall the bits of memory about tests and exams, a memory of the last day of the Entrance Examination of Senior High Schools was just pouring out spontaneously.*
>
> *It seems that I have never shared this with others in such a systematic manner. The discovery of my understanding of the examination and the use of the analogy of fight-in-a-battle-field strikes me very much. I now start to understand better why I sometimes cannot accept some students who do not try hard. I also get to understand better why I did*

> *not have many good friends when I was in the secondary school. So I acquire a better understanding of myself and of my students by looking at my own writing.*
>
> *I was also surprised by my ability to write. Perhaps being too busy is simply an excuse not to write. This writing is a new discovery of myself.*
>
> (Xiaohong Wang, a grade 11 History teacher)

We cannot expect teachers to be so sensitive that they never allow students to be put in challenging situations. At any rate, this is almost impossible in the present situation in China education system and its soundness can be questioned as well. However, given that the present examination system is a reality, changes will still take time to come, when teachers begin to feel uncomfortable about some situations created by standardized examination and assessment situation, in which children at vastly different levels are expected to attempt the same material at the same time in the same way, perhaps they can become more sensitive in dealing with the students at risk.

D. Pedagogical tact and awareness for potential damage to the student

The stories that are collected in this research have shown teachers' sensitivity or insensitivity to students' needs in various ways. Without an initial sensitivity both to what the students are experiencing as well as to their needs there would be no thoughtful action taking place on the part of the teacher. One grade 7 student says: "I remember how in grade 4, because I wrote the Chinese character "De

(德)" wrong, the language arts teacher punished me by making me copy the character 500 times." We cannot help asking ourselves, is the teacher doing the appropriate thing for the student? This kind of punishment has been so common among Chinese teachers that they usually do not think any further in response to a student failing at some task.

Sometimes, students who excel in an exam receive a dubious punishment. The highest score not only brings them a transient joy and a sense of success, but also brings a ton of extra assignments to further strengthen this unexpected talent. The joy of learning after the first exam thus vanishes. The student who has become a prodigy at writing almost overnight (by doing well on an exam) says, "Writing is not interesting any more. I feel regretful that I won the writing exam." The keen parent who wants to nurture the child's sudden talent actually kills the child's interest in learning to write. It is what Kohn calls, "Punish by Reward" (1999).

All these stories can provide teachers food for reflection and cultivate teachers' pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness in dealing with students and motivate the teachers to seek out alternatives that better address the needs of students. It is hopeful that, when teachers, parents and other adults realize that the need to understand better the student's experiential life on examination and exam related situations, brought about by reflection on their own experiences or those of others (especially their students), they will act more pedagogically in actual situations to provide the best learning opportunities for their students and for the good of the students.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

The exams and the exam oriented education system in China has a long history and has formed a strong exam culture in the contemporary fabric of Chinese life. Issues of efficiency, effectiveness, validity, and fairness surrounding testing and test construction also have a significant history of debate and have been the subject of research among scholars—both in the East and the West. However, studying the phenomenon of examinations and tests from the experiential perspective of students and their families is a new initiative in this field of research.

The present project is a phenomenological inquiry into the phenomenon of the test and examination experience. It asks the simple question what it is like to experience tests and examinations. The research shows that it would be limiting to restrict the study to the one, two or three hours that students are actually involved in doing tests and exams. When students are asked about their examination experiences they immediately recall events that may have to do with preparing for the tests, anticipating exams, doing exams, waiting for exam results, and many other related aspects of the test and exam experience that have to do with the entire context of testing and assessment. It appears that for many students, even the everyday life in classrooms can be experienced as permeated with the atmosphere, tone and ambience of tests and examinations.

Phenomenological studies, of course, are always embedded in the complex lifeworlds where teachers, students, parents and other educators are themselves situated with their own interests and preoccupations. Thus the study of student experiences of tests and examinations is not done from some objective and disinterested scientific vantage point. In the case of this educational study the interest in student experiences is pedagogical. Educators who read the accounts of children and childhood memories of adults (chapter 4) cannot help but reflect on the stories in a manner that poses the question of what is a proper pedagogical response. How should and would truly thoughtful educators consider and use tests and examinations in this postmodern world where educational systems in changing societies such as China are faced with contradictory pressures? It appears that the climate of examinations and testing in China are so all-pervasive that it is hard for well-meaning teachers and parents not to be swept up in the sometimes stormy and seemingly inevitable weather patterns that rule people's lives.

The student's experience of examinations in the Chinese context presented in this dissertation show that some Chinese student examination experiences are recognizable across cultures, while other experiences may be strongly rooted in Chinese traditional culture, especially in the dominant examination culture. Readers from Western societies may feel surprised or even confused about some of the cultural dimensions of the exam driven educational systems. Historically, the Chinese examination system and its tradition come from the

Confucian thought of "elitism." Its aim is to select the best through the imperial examination system, so that these elite may serve the state for the good of all. This Confucian tradition has created a high respect for education, for the educated person, for the scholar-ruling class that are selected from the exams, but at the same time, it has created a huge crowd of examinees, with the strong support, high expectation and pressure from their family and relatives around, that pursue in their lifetime the dream of becoming an educated person. Exams now seem to serve different purposes of the welfare of the collective and the good of all.

The meaning structures of eastern examination experiences seem to differ, in some respects, from the modern western examination system. The latter is obviously a legacy of industrial revolution, capitalist expansion and globalization. For example, as shown in the students' stories, contemporary Chinese students may experience examination as a "family" event. Chinese students may also experience the examination as "adding honor" and "adding or losing face." The current western idea of accountability, measurability and quality control in modern society (modern education) is actually imported from the industry and business practices. Since the industrial revolution, the work streamlining concept has been introduced and there has been the strong belief that everything must be and can be controlled in the process of production. There is also the belief that rigorous measurement can stimulate high quality and work performance. Competing in the age of globalization is perhaps one of the important elements that keep the examination legacy alive as a very key to maintain accountability and measurability in a globalized context.

So in China, since the loss of the war against western colonialist countries in late Qing Dynast, the modern Chinese examination system has become a strange mixture of the Chinese elitism tradition with the globalization line of thinking – knowledge production and talent production. So, reading and interpreting Chinese students' experience needs both a strong humanistic and cultural awareness and a grasp of the contemporary global movement in all aspects of people's lives. It is in this context of such awareness that teachers and other educators may gain a better understanding and a more thoughtful pedagogical perspective on Chinese students' examination experiences.

In the present global world order, that favors everything (ac)countable and measurable, exams of various types in the education systems seem to be entrenched here for good. "The system of competitive examination is a sad necessity" (Bowen, 2000). Philip Jackson (1968) also described the assessment situations as an important aspect of the hidden curriculum operating alongside the formal or overt curriculum:

> *Every child experiences the pain of failure and the joy of success long before he reaches school age, but his achievements, or lack of them do*

> *not really become official until he enters the classroom. From then on, however, a semi-public record of his progress gradually accumulates, and as a student he must learn to adapt to the continued and pervasive spirit of evaluation that will dominate his school years.*
>
> (1968, p. 19)

On the one hand, every one of us, at some time of our lives, takes exams. On the other hand, teachers are often put in situations that they must make constant formative and summative assessments. Obviously, the pedagogical issues around tests and test driven system are very complicated. There are no simple solutions to the pressures and problems that children experience who are subjected to it. The important point here is that we need to constantly question how we should live with the students in test situations and constantly discern in actual exam and related situations what is in the best interest for the well being of the students in the present and for their future lives.

The experiential anecdotes and the interpretation of the pedagogical significance underlying the Chinese educational practices in this dissertation may provide an important source and opportunity for reflection on the pedagogical questions and the cultural dimensions of examinations in Chinese schools and society. Teachers, students, parents, education scholars, test design experts, curriculum developers, education administrators as well as education policy makers will hopefully benefit from an increased awareness of the historical background, economic functions and the cultural nature of examinations in China.

The present study of the students' examination experiences is hopefully significant in several respects, in the way that it contributes towards a more comprehensive understanding and a more thoughtful and sensitive pedagogy of testing and examinations.

First, this study is related to the general area of evaluation, assessment and measurement in education. While there is already a large body of research literature regarding the topic of educational exams and tests, assessment and measurement, most of them are done from empirical perspectives, analyzing the political, educational and economic influence, or discussing the methods to generate test items (e.g. factor analysis, item response theory), psychometrical analysis of exams (e.g. test validity and reliability study, test effectiveness and outcomes, computer-based test research and design), and so on. The present research aims to contribute towards an experiential understanding of exams and exam related events and a fuller understanding of pedagogy. By turning to the experiences of students and by reflecting upon them, the dimensions of pedagogical meanings that underlie the students' exam experiences can be explored, discussed and further understood by teachers, parents, education scholars, test design experts, curriculum developers, education administrators as well as education policy makers. It is hopeful that we may become more sensitive, thoughtful and tactful in discerning what is appropriate and what is less appropriate, or even downright damaging in our daily interactions with students.

Second, the study may provide a useful and important theme for educational policy makers and administrators to develop more appropriate curricula, test programs and evaluation practices for students in a world of educational trend that seems to move ever faster towards accountability and measurability spurred by forces of internationalization and globalization.

Finally, the research also opens a space of opportunity for intercultural dialogue between East and West. In recent years, there is a surge of restored interest and tendency in nationalizing, regionalizing and even globalizing educational tests in many countries in the world, especially among industrial countries. As schools and school systems in North America are moving steadily towards further standardized test-based and exam-driven reforms, Chinese systems seem to be struggling to move away from such emphasis in order to develop "quality education." Lessons can be drawn by other countries from the Chinese experiences to avoid serious problems in their own ongoing school reforms. In turn, Chinese educators can benefit from understanding the educational experiences in the West.

A thoughtful and sensitive pedagogy of examination would therefore admit the existence and continuous improvement of examination and evaluation system towards the well being of children, but more importantly, continuously reflect upon our living with children and students in examination environments and be sensitive to students' experiences. Pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness is a type of embodied knowledge that requires constant and continuous attention to students' lived experiences. "Life in classroom is contingent; every moment is situation specific. In our pedagogical living with children nothing is ever completely foreseeable, predictable, plannable, manageable "(van Manen, 1991, pp. 112-113). In this sense, practicing pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness and attuning ourselves in the student's experience is an ongoing challenge.

Notes:

1. Robert A. Reineke makes a distinction between assessment and testing. He suggests that assessment reflects a more comprehensive set of activities and methods to promote learning than does testing. Evaluation is an acceptable alternative of assessment (Reineke, 1998, p. ix). Measurement suggests a more quantitative approach to assessment or evaluation. In my present study, I am using these terms interchangeably for my interest is more on the experiential dimension of the students under these situations, rather than on the distinction between technical concepts.
2. Norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests: these are the two main test types of standardized testing. Norm-referenced tests are designed to highlight the achievement differences between and among students to produce a dependable rank order of students across a continuum of achievement from high achievers to low achievers. This rank order is often represented by a bell curve and is used to compare students to one another. Test content (the norm) is chosen based on pilot testing done with a group of students. criterion-referenced tests are instituted in order to see "what test takers can do and what they know, not how they compare to others They report how well students are doing relative to a pre-determined performance level on a specified set of education goals or outcomes included in

the school, district, or state curriculum ". Scores are represented in a variety of ways and usually have a cut-off point that students must pass. Test content is chosen based on how well it matches a school, district, or state's curriculum - not how well it ranks students (Wiersma et al, 1990. pp. 13-17).

3. Attending the China 1985 seminar on issues of examinations were all officials in charge of examinations at the provincial and national levels, technicians and psychometricians in charge of designing examination items, and senior university officials and planners in the China Ministry of Education. Attending from outside the country were the chief executive officers of examination agencies in three OECD countries: from the United States, Robert Solomon (ETS); from Japan, Tadashi Hidano (National Center for University Examinations); from the United Kindom, John Reddaway (Cambridge University Examination Syndicate); directors of the (NAEP) National Assessment of Educational Progress and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement; and experts on the examination systems in Sweden, Australia, and Kenya.
4. The photos used in this dissertation were taken by the author unless they are otherwise indicated.

Bibliography

Adams, D. K. (1970). *Education and modernization in Asia*. Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

AERA, APA, NCME. (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing. Washington*, DC: American Psychological Association.

Alberta Teachers' Association. *Trying to teach*. Monographs. Retrieved on June 19, 2001, <http: //www.teachers.ab.ca/ publications/ monographs/_trying/trying08.html>

Albrow, M. (Ed.). (1990). *Globalization, knowledge, and society: readings from International sociology*. Newbury Park, CAL: Sage Publications.

Alston, W.P. & Naknikian, G. (Trans.). (1973). *The idea of Phenomenology* by Edmund Hussel. The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff.

Arendt, H. (1968). *Between past and future – eight exercises in political thought*. Toronto: Penguin Books.

Ashford, M. (1998). *Hope in a changing world": changing social, cultural, economic and political dynamics that will affect teachers in the 21st Century*. Keynote Speech, BCTF Quality Teaching Conference, Richmond, B.C., April 5.

Atkin, M. J., Black, P., & Coffey, J. (2001). *Classroom assessment and the national science education standards*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

Aitken, E. N. (1994). A hermeneutic phenomenological investigation of students' experience of test-taking. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta

Austin, R. D. (1996). *Measuring and managing performance in organizations.* New York: Dorset House.

Ayers, W. (1971). *Chang Chih-tung and educational reform in China.* Boston: Harvard University Press.

Bailey, P. J. (1990). *Reform the people: changing attitudes towards popular education in early twentieth-century China.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Bakken, B. (2000). *The exemplary society: human improvement, social control, and the dangers of modernity in China.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Banta, T. (1999) Assessing Competence in Higher Education. *International Perspectives on Curriculum Studies, Vol. 1, Chapter 1.* London: Ablex Publishing.

Barnes, M., Clarke, D., & Stephens, M. (2002). Assessment: the engine of systemic curricular reform? *Journal of Curriculum Studies. Vol.33, no.*5, pp. 623-650.

Bell, B., & Cowie, B. (2001). *Formative assessment and science education.* Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Benton, M. (2000). *Studies in the spectator role: literature, painting, and pedagogy.* New York: Routledge.

Biggs, J. (1995). Assessing for learning: some dimensions underlying new approaches to educational assessment. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, no.*41*, pp.1-17.

Biggs, J. (1996). *Testing: To educate or to select? Education in Hong Kong at the cross roads.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Educational Publishing Co.

Biggs, J., & Watkins, D. A. (Eds.). (1996). *The Chinese learner: cultural, psychological and contextual influences.* Hong Kong: ACER.

Biggs, J., & Watkins, D.A. (Eds.). (2001). *Teaching the chinese learner: psychological and pedagogical perspectives.* Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.

Black, P. (1998). Formative assessment: raising standards inside the classroom. *School Science Review*, Vol. *80, no.* 291, pp. 39-46.

Black, P. (1999). Formative assessment and curriculum consequences. *International perspectives on curriculum studies. Vol. 1, Chapter 2.* London: Ablex Publishing.

Brady, L., & Kennedy, K. (2001). *Celebrating student achievement: assessment and reporting.* Australia: Pearson Education.

Bryant, S., & Timmins, A. (2002). *Portfolio Assessment: Instructional Guide 2nd edition.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Bryk, A. S. (1988). Musings on the moral life of schools. *American Journal of Education, Vol.1,* pp. 256-290.

Bruner, J. S. (1972). Nature and Uses of Immaturity. *American Psychologist, Vol.27, no.*8, pp. 28 - 60.

Bruner, J. S., Allison, J., & Kathy, S. (1976). *Play - its role in development and evolution.* New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Buber, M. (1961). *Between man and man.* Boston : Beacon Press.

Burbules, N. C., &Alterto Torres, C. (Eds.). (2000). *Globalization and education : critical perspectives.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Burch, R. (1989). Phenomenology and its Practices. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy.* University of Alberta. Vol. 7, pp. 187-217.

Bushweller, K. (1997). Teaching to the test. *The American School Board Journal,* September, 20.

Calgary Board of Education. Media Services Group. (1982). *Education in China* [1 filmstrip (27 fr.) :]. Calgary: The Board.

Canadian Federation of Teachers. (1999). *Province-wide assessment programs.* Retrieved <from http://www.ctf-fce.ca/e/what/other/assessment/testing-main.htm>.

Carthew, W. S., & University of Alberta. Dept. of Educational Foundations. (1978). *Education for socialism: a comparative study of educational strategies and their political-economic contexts in China and Tanzania.*

Central Institute of Educational Research. (Eds.). (1986). *China educational sciences.* Beijing: Educational Sciences Publishing House.

Chan, D. W. (1998). *Helping students with learning difficulties.* Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Chantrell, G. (2002). (Ed.). *The Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories.* London: Oxford University Press.

Chen, C.C. (1989). *Chung-kuo chiao yü shih.* Shanghai: Shang-hai shu tien.

Cheng, T-H. (2000). *China moulded by Confusius : the chinese way in western light.* London: AntiQbook.

China Chiao yü pu. (1985). *Achievement of education in China, 1949-1983: statistics*. Beijing: Dept. of Planning Ministry of Education.

China Kuo chia chiao yü wei yüan hui. (1986). *The development of education in China, 1984-1986: country report from the People's Republic of China*. Beijing: State Education Commission People's Republic of China.

Choi, C-c. (1999). Public examinations in Hong Kong. *Assessment in education*. Vol.*6, no.*3, pp. 405-417.

Chu, Y. (1997). *Wu Hsün chuan* (Ti 1 pan. ed.). Pei-ching: Chung-kuo hsi chü chu pan she.

Clarke S. (2001). *Unlocking formative assessment: practical strategies for enhancing pupil's learning in the primary classroom.* London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational.

Cleverley, J. F. (1991). *The schooling of China : tradition and modernity in Chinese education Chung-kuo p*ei hsün jen ts*ai chih tao lu* Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Coffey, A., & Delamont, S. (2000). *Feminism and the classroom teacher: research, praxis, and pedagogy*. New York: Falmer Press.

Connell, W. F. (1973). *China at school*. Sydney: Ian Novak Publishing Co.

Cowley, P. (1999). *Comparing schools made possible*. Calgary Herald, June 20, A10.

CPA. (1987). *Guidelines for educational and psychological testing*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Psychological Association.

Danielson, C. & Abrutyn, L. (1997). *An introduction to using portfolios in the classroom.* Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dassa, C., et al. (1993). Formative assessment in a classroom setting: From practice to computer innovations. *Alberta Journal & Education Research*, Vol.*39, no.*1, pp. 111-125.

De Bary, W. T., Chaffee, J. W., & Birge, B. (1989). *Neo-Confucian education: the formative stage.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

De Castell, S., and Jenson, J. (2003). Serious Play. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, Vol.35, no.*6, pp. 649-665.

Diez, M. (1998). Assessing student competence in teacher education programs. *International Perspectives on Curriculum Studies*. Vol. 1, Chapter 3. London: Ablex Publishing.

Dougherty, M. J. (1997). Formative assessment: From practice to computer innovations. *The Science Teacher*, Vol.*64, no.*6, pp. 29-33.

Douthat, R. (2005). The truth about Harvard. *The Altantic*, Vol.295, no.2.

DuBois, P. H. (1970). *A history of psychological testing.* Boston, MASS: Allyn and Bacon.

Duncan, N. J. (1979). *Western and Chinese relationships to educational philosophy.* Hongkong: Asian Research Service.

Duoweinews.com, http://www3.chinesenewsnet.com/gb/index.html, June 22, 2001.

Edmunds, C. K. (1919). *Modern education in china.* Washington, D.C.:

Government Printing Office.

Edmunds, C. K. (1973). *Modern education in China*. Taipei, Taiwan: Ch'eng-wen Pub.

Edwards, R., & Usher, R. (2000). *Globalisation and pedagogy: space, place, and identity*. New York: Routledge.

Elkind, D. (2001*). The hurried child (third edition)*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.

Epstein, I. (1991). *Chinese education : problems, policies, and prospects*. New York: Garland Pub.

EQAO. (1998a). *Parent handbook 1997-1998*. Toronto, ONT: Queen's Printer of Ontario.

EQAO. (1998b). *Educators handbook*. Toronto, ONT: Queen's Printer of Ontario.

Farrell-Childers, P. B., & Lowry, M. (1997). Engaging students through formative assessment in science. *The Clearing House*, Vol.71, Nov/Dec, pp. 97-102

Faulder, L. (2000). School days, dull days: "E" should be for excitement: The Hong Kong school system is failing its students, who obediently recite lessons but don't learn how to think for themselves. *The Edmonton Journal*. December 24.

Ferguson, M. E. (1970). *China Medical Board and Peking Union Medical College: a chronicle of fruitful collaboration, 1914-1951*. New York, NY: China Medical Board of New York.

Fernandez, A. M. (1975). *Struggle as norm: education in contemporary China.* Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

Frost, J. L. (2003). Bridging the gaps: children in a changing society. *Childhood Education, Vol.80, no.*1, pp. 29-34.

Gadamer, H-G. (1989). *Truth and method.* New York: Crossroad.

Gagnon Jr. G. W., & Collay M. (2001) *Designing for Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

Gardner, H. (1989a). Learning Chinese style. *Psychology Today*, Vol.23, no.12, pp. 54-56.

Gardner, H. (1989b). *To open minds: Chinese clues to the dilemma of contemporary education.* New York: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (1990, September). Art education and human evelopment. *Occasional Pape*r 3, Los Angeles: The Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Giorgi, A. (Ed). (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Gunzhausuer, M. G. (2003). High-stakes testing and the default philosophy of education. *Theory into Practice, Vol.42, no.*1, pp. 51-58.

Hackett, S. C. (1979). *Oriental philosophy: A western guide to eastern thought.* Madison, WC: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Haladyna, T. M., Nolen, S. B., & Haas, N. S. (1991). Raising standardized achievement test scores and the origins of test score pollution. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. *20*, pp. 2-7.

Hansen, D. (1995). *The call to teach.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Harrison, T., et al. (1999). *Contested classrooms : education, globalization and democracy in Alberta.* Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

Hawkins, J. N. (1974). *Mao-Tsê-tung and education: his thoughts and teachings.* North Haven, CT: Linnet Books.

Hayhoe, R. (1984). *Contemporary Chinese education.* London: Croom Helm.

Hayhoe, R. (1992). *Education and modernization: the Chinese experience.* New York, NY: Pergamon Press.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time.* New York: Harper and Row.

Heidegger, M. (1982). Hofstadter, A. (Trans.). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Herman, J. L., & Golan, S. (1993). The effects of standardized testing on teaching and schools. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, Winter*, pp. 20-42.

Heyneman, S. P., & Fägerlind, I. (1988). *University examinations and standardized testing : principles, experience, and policy options.* Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Hixson, B. K. (2000,). How tests change a teacher. *The New York Times.* January 25.

Hong Kong. (1982). *A Perspective on education in Hong Kong : report.* [S.l.: s.n.

Hong Kong. Government Secretariat. (1981). *The Hong Kong education system: overall review of the Hong Kong education system*. Hong Kong: Govt. Secretariat Hong Kong Govt.

Ho, P-t. (1962). *The ladder of success in Imperial China; aspects of social mobility, 1368-1911*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Huang, C-c. (Trans.). (1997). *The analects of Confucius*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hu, C. & Columbia University. East Asian Institute. (1969). *Aspects of Chinese education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Huntsinger, C. S., Jose, P. E., Larson, S. L., Krieg, D. B., & Shaligram, C. (2000). Mathematics, vocabulary, and reading development in Chinese American and European American children over the Primary School years. *Journal of Educational Psychology. Vol.92, no.* 4.

Hussel, E. (1970). *The Crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwest University Press.

Jackson, P. (1968) *Life in Classrooms*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York.

Jen, S.-h. (1984). *Chung-kuo chiao yü ssu hsiang shih* (Ti 1 pan. ed.). Shang-hai: Shang-hai shu tien.

Jeynes, W. H. (1999). The effects of children of divorce living with neither parent on the academic achievement of those children. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, Vol.*30*, pp.103-120.

Jones, K., & Whitford, B. L. (1997). Kentucky's conflicting reform principles: High-stakes school accountability and student performance assessment.

Phi Delta Kappan, Vol.*70*, pp. 276-281.

Keenan, B. (1977). *The Dewey experiment in China : educational reform and political power in the early Republic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Kirchner, G., & Canfilm M. (1975). *China* [6 filmstrips :]. Willowdale, Ont.: Canfilm Media.

Klaassen, C. (2000). The moral role of teachers according to themselves. Paper presented at the 2000 Conference of the Association for Moral Education AME 2000 in Glasgow Scotland, July 7-11.

Klein, E. (1971). *Klein's comprehensive etymological dictionary of the English language*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Klenowski V. (2002) *Developing Portfolios for Learning and Assessment*. New York: Routledge.

Kohn, A. (2000). *The case against standardized testing: raising the scores, ruining the schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kohn, A. (1999). *Punished by rewards: The trouble with Gold Stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kohn, A. (1986). *No contest: The case against competition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kretschmer, F. A. (1994). *An American teacher in China : coping with cultures*. Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey.

Kuei, F. (1736-1805). Shuo wen chieh tzu i cheng. [Chi-nan shih] : Chi lu shu she, 1987.

Kuo, P. W. (1972). *The Chinese system of public education*. New York: AMS Press.

Lateline News, Retrieved on June 6, 2005, from <http://dailynews.muzi.com/ll/english/1366033.shtml>

Lau, D. C. (Trans.). (1987). *The Analects (Lun yu)*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Lee, T. H. C. (2000). *Education in traditional China : a history*. Boston, MASS: Brill.

Levin, K., Little A., Xu, H., & Zheng, J. (1994). *Education innovation in China: Tracing the impact of the 1985 reform.* Harlow, UK: Longman.

Leicester, M., Modgil, C., & Modgil, S. (2000). *Classroom issues: practice, pedagogy, and curriculum*. London New York: Falmer Press.

Levering, Bas & Van Manen, Max (2002). Phenomenological Anthropology in the Netherlands and Flanders. In Tymieniecka, Teresa (ed.) *Phenomenology World-Wide*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Press.

Li, L. (1997). The fundamental mission of basic education is to enhance the quality of the entire nation (Speech by Vice Premier Li Langqing during an inspection of quality education at Miluo). *China Education and Society*, Vol. 30, no., 6, November – December, pp. 29-36.

Lin, B.-j., & Fan, L.-m. (1990). *Education in mainland China : review and evaluation*. Taipei: International Relations National Chengchi University.

Lin, J. (1993). *Education in post-Mao China*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Liu, J., R, H. A., & Kelly, D. P. (2000). *The ethnographic eye : interpretive studies of education in China*. New York: Falmer Press.

Löfstedt, J. & Stockholms universitet. Institutionen för internationell pedagogik. (1986). *Educational planning in China*. Stockholm: Dept. of Education Institute of International Education University of Stockholm.

Lytton, H., & Pyryt, M. (1998). Predictors of achievement in basic skills: A Canadian effective schools study. *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol.*23*, pp. 281-301.

Maduas, G. F., & Stufflebeam, D. (Eds.). (1989). *Educational evaluation: classic works of Ralph W. Tyler*. Boston, MASS: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Maki P.L. (2002). Developing an Assessment Plan to Learn about Student Learning.*Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

Martin, W. A. P. (1881). *The Chinese : their education, philosophy, and letters*. New York: Harper.

Martin, W. A. P. (1901). *The lore of Cathay*: Fleming H. Revell company.

Mathews, J., & Argetsinger, A. (June 2, 2000). Teachers say pressure to do well on tests is enormous. *Washington Post*, B1, A18.

Mauger, S., & Center for Cassette Studies. (1973). *Education in the new China a first-hand report on youth and education in today's Red China* [1 sound cassette (30 min.) ;]. N. Hollywood, Calif.: Center for Cassette Studies.

Mauger, P., Mauger, S., Edmonds, W., Berger, R., Daly, P., & Marett, V. (1974). *Education in China*. Anglo-Chinese Educational Institute.

Markov, I. & Foppa, K. (Eds.). (1991). *Asymmetries in dialogue*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

McCallum B. (2001) *Formative assessment – implications for classroom practice.* Retrieved *from< http://www.qca.org.uk>*

McLean, R. (1997). Selected attitudinal factors related to students' success in high school. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *43*, 165-168.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1989). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Ministry of Education. *China Education and Research Network*. July 21, 2001. <http://www.cernet.edu.cn/>

Mirazaki, I. (1976). *Chinese examination hell*. New York, NY: Weather Hill.

Mitchell, R. E. (1972). *Pupil, parent, and school: a Hong Kong study*. Orient Cultural Service.

Mittelman, J. H. (2000). *The globalization syndrome : transformation and resistance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (1988). An ethic of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements. *American Journal of Education, February*, pp. 215-230.

Nohl, H. (1982). *Die pädagogische Bewegung in Deutschland und ihre Theorie*. Frankfurt am Main: Schulte-Bulmke.

Onions, C.T. (Ed.). (1979). *The Oxford dictionary of English etymology*. London: Oxford University Press.

Ornstein, A. C. & Hunkins, F. (1993). *Curriculum Foundations, Principles, and Theories*. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon

Ohanian, S. (1999). *One size fits few*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Palmer, R. 1969, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Palomba C. (1999). *Assessment essentials: planning, implementing and improving assessment in higher education.* California, USA: Higher and Adult Education Series.

Palomba C.A. (2000). Implementing effective assessment. *International Perspectives on Curriculum Studies, Vol. 1, Chapter 1*. London: Ablex Publishing.

Palomba C.A., (2001). Assessment experiences in accredited disciplines. *International Perspectives on Curriculum Studies,Vol. 1, Chapter 13*. London: Ablex Publishing.

Parker, F. (1977). *What can we learn from the schools of China?* Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Parker, F., & Parker, B. J. (1986). *Education in the People's Republic of China, past and present : an annotated bibliography*. New York: Garland Pub.

Pellegrino, J., Chudowsky, N., & Glaser, R. (2001). *Knowing what students know: the science and design of educational assessment.* The National Academies Press.

Pepper, S., & University of California Berkeley. Center for Chinese Studies. (1990). *China's education reform in the 1980s : policies, issues, and historical perspectives*. Berkeley, Calif.: Institute of East Asian Studies University of California at Berkeley Center for Chinese Studies.

Pepper, S. (1996). *Radicalism and education reform in twentieth-century China.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pepper, S. (1997). Guest editor's introduction. China Education and Society, Vol. 30, no. 2, March-April, pp. 7 -10.

Piaget, J.-P. (1962). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood.* Norton, New York.

Pong, W. Y., & Chow, J. C.S. (2002). On the pedagogy of examinations in Hong Kong. *The Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education*. Vol.*18, no.*1.

Popham, W. J. (1990). *Modern educational measurement: a practitioner's perspective.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Price, R. F. (1970). *Education in communist China*. London: Routledge & K. Paul.

Price, R. F. (1977). *Marx and education in Russia and China*. London: Roman and Littlefield.

Ravitch, D. (ed.) (1995). *Debating the future of American education: Do we need national standards and assessment?* Washington D.C: The Bookings Institute.

Reineke, R. (1998). *Challenging the mind, touching the heart: Best assessment practices*. Thousand Oaks, CAL: Corwin Press, Inc.

Reagan, T. (1996). *Non-western educational traditions: alternative approaches to educational thought and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Riceour, P. (1987). Blamey, K, & Thompson, J. B. (Trans.). (1991). *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Riceour, P. (1990). Blamey, K. (Trans.). *Oneself as another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization : social theory and global culture*. London: Sage.

Roper, M. (1966). *China the surprising country*. New York: Heinemann.

Rose, M. (1995). *Possible lives - the promise of public education in America*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Rosen, S. (1985). Recentralization, decentralization, and tationalization. *Modern China*, Vol. 11, no.3, pp. 301-346.

Rosen, S. (1987). Restoring key secondary schools in post-Mao China: The politics of competition and educational quality. In D.M. Lampton (Ed.), *Policy implementation in post-Mao China*. Berkeeley, Ca: University of California Press.

Sadler, D.R. (1998). *Formative assessment: revisiting the territory.* Assessment in Education, Vol.*5, no.*1, pp. 77-84.

Salganik, L. H. (1985). Why testing reforms are so popular and how they are changing education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol.*66*, pp. 607-610.

Schoenhals, M. (1993).*The paradox of power in a People's Republic of China middle school.* Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

Seybolt, P. J., Yang, C. K., Hinton, W., Chin, R., Hso, F., & American Educational Research Association. (1974). *Education in China* [1 sound cassette :]. [S.l.]: American Educational Research Assoc.

Shen, X-D., et al. (2001). An unsuccessful CEE candidates has been found and reunited with his family. *Yangtse Evening News*. Aug 1, 2001.

Sheng-Wu, X., & Unesco. (1979). *How the Chinese people extensively take part in developing science, education and culture*. Paris: Unesco.

Shorrocks-Taylor, D. & Jenkins, E. W. (Eds.). (2000). *Learning from Others.* Boston, Mass: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Simner, M. L. (2000). A joint position statement by the Canadian Psychological Association and the Canadian Association of School Psychologists on the Canadian press coverage of the province-wide achievement test results.

Canadian Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.cpa.ca/document/joint_position.html>

Smith, D. G. (2000).The Specific Challenges of Globalization to Teaching and Vice Versa. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research.* Vol.*1* , n.46.

Smith, D. G. (1999a). Economic Fundamentalism, Globalization and the Public Remains of Education. *Interchange, Vol.1, no.*30, pp.93-117.

Smith, D. G. (1999b). Identity, self, and other in the conduct of pedagogical action: an East/West inquiry. In *Contemporary Curriculum* (Ed. Wm. Pinar). New York: Lang.

Smyth, J. (Ed.) (1995). *Academic work: the changing labour process in higher Education.* Bristol, PA : Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University.

Stevenson, H. W., & Lee, S. (1990). Contexts of achievement: a study of American, Chinese and Japanese children. *Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development.* Vol.221, no. 55, pp.1-2. Chicago, MI: University of Chicago Press.

Stevenson, H. W., Lee, S., et al. (1990). Mathematics Achievement of Children in China and the United States. *Child development.* Vol.*61*, pp.1053-1057.

Stevenson, H. W., & Stigler, J. S. (1992). *The learning gap: why our schools are failing and what we can learn from Japanese and Chinese education.* New York, NY: Summit Books.

Stevenson, H. W. (1992). Learning from Asian Schools. *Scientific American. December 1992*, pp. 70-76.

Stigler, J. W. (1991). Polishing the Stone: How Asian teachers perfect their lessons. *American Educator. Spring 1991*, pp.12-47.

Stromquist, N.P. & K. Monkman. (Eds.) (2000). *Globalization and education: integration and contestation across cultures.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Su, J. (1999). *Seminar presentation: Comparison between U.S.A and China educational system.* Presentation paper in China Institute.

Su, W., & Luo, F. (1983). *A nation at school.* Beijing, China: Beijing Review Publications : Distributed by China Publications Centre.

Taylor, R. (1981). *China's intellectual dilemma.* Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.

The China Handbook Editorial Committee. (Eds.) (1983). *Education and science.* Beijing: Foreign Language Press.

Ting, C.-p. i., & Shang wu yin shu kuan. (1990). *Chung-kuo chin ch'i shih nien lai chiao yü chi shih* (Ti 1 pan. ed.). Shang-hai: Shang-hai shu tien.

Tom, A. R. (1984). *Teaching as a moral craft.* New York, NY: Longman.

Torrance, H. & Pryor, J. (1998): *Investigating Formative Assessment: Teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom.* Open University Press, UK

Tsang, C-s. (1967). *Nationalism in school education in China.* Progressive Education Publishers.

Tu, W-m. (1994). (Ed.). *"Cultural China: The periphery as the center." The living tree: The changing meaning of Being Chinese today*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Van Manen, M. (2002). *The tone of teaching: the language of pedagogy*. London, ON: The Althouse Press.

Van Manen, Max (2001). Professional Practice and 'Doing Phenomenology.' In S. Kay Toombs (Ed.). Handbook of Phenomenology and Medicine (Philosophy and Medicine Series) Dordrecht: Kluwer Press.

Van Manen, Max. (1999). The Language of pedagogy and primacy of student experience. In J. Loughran (ed.) *Researching teaching: Methodologies and practices for understanding pedagogy*. London: Falmer Press.

Van Manen, M. (1997, 2nd edition). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. London, Ont.: Althouse Press.

Van Manen, Max. (1995). Epistemology of reflective practice, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, Vol.1, no.*1.

Van Manen, Max. (1991a). *The tact of teaching: the meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. Albany,London, Ont.: Althouse Press.

Van Manen, Max. (1991b). Reflectivity and the pedagogical moment: the normativity of pedagogical thinking and acting. J*ournal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol.23*,* no.6, pp. 507-536.

Van Manen, Max. (1990). *Researching lived experience: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, ON: Althouse Press.

Van Manen, M. (1989). "By the Light of Anecdote." *Phenomenology + Pedagogy.* Vol. 7, pp. 232-253.

Van Manen, M. (1986). *The Tone of Teaching*. Richmond Hill: Scholastic Press; Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Van Manen, M. (1985). "Action Research as Theory of the Unique: From Pedagogic Thoughtfulness to Pedagogic Tactfulness," *Department of Secondary Education Occasional Paper*, no. 32, 1985.

Wang, J., Wu, Y., & State University of New York at Buffalo. Comparative Education Center. (1989). *Perspectives on contemporary education in China : proceedings of the First Conference of China Education International held at State University of New York at Buffalo, July 1-3, 1988.* Amherst, NY: Publications Division Comparative Education Center Faculty of Educational Studies State University of New York at Buffalo.

Wang, Y. C., & Mei, Y.S. (1978). *Chung-kuo chih shih fen tzu yü hsi fang : liu hsüeh sheng yü chin tai Chung-kuo, 1872-1949* (Ch*u pan. ed.). [Hsin-chu]: Feng ch*eng ch*u pan she.

Wang, C. (2000). From manpower supply to economic revival: Governance and financing of Chinese higher education. *Education Policy Analysis Archives,* Vol. 8, no. 26, Retrieved November 15, 2001 from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n26.html .

White, R. (1995). *Global spin : probing the globalization debate : where in the world are we going?* Toronto, ONT: Dundurn Press.

Wiersma, W. & Jurs, S. G. (1990). *Educational measurement and testing.* Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

World Bank. (1985). *China, issues and prospects in education.* Washington, D.C., U.S.A.: World Bank.

Wright, B. R. (1967). *Guidance in Hong Kong--a secondary school research report.* Hong Kong Council for Educational Research.

Wu, W., Chen, S. C., Shu, H.-l., & Wu, Y.-b. (1987). *Educational reform and development in China.* Buffalo: Comparative Education Center State University of New York at Buffalo.

Wu, W., & Unesco. (1981). *Democratization of education in China.* Paris: Unesco.

Yao, G., & University of Alberta. Dept. of Elementary Education. (1997). *A journey cross cultures : a narrative inquiry of learning and teaching.*

Zhang, L.P. *Yangtze Evening News* A1, August 1, 2003.

Yip, P.S.F. (1998). The epidemiological profile of youth suicides. In P.S.F. Yip (Ed.) *Youth Suicides in Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: Befrienders International.

Yung B. H. W.(2000) *Teachers' Awareness in an Assessment Reform: Implications for Teacher Professional Development*, Paper presented at the International Forum on Educational Reforms.

Yung, W. (1978). *My life in China and America.* New York: Arno Press.

Yung, W., & Twichell, J. H. (1909). *My life in China and America*: H. Holt.

Zook, D. R., & Dept. of Secondary Education. (2000). *Exploring imagination, film and social studies : engaging a transformative pedagogy of desire.* University of Alberta.

Appendix I Ethical Application Form

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND EXTENSION RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

Section 1: Overview of Research Project

Name: Shuying Li

Project Title: Pedagogy of Examinations: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations

Please provide a clear concise description of the purpose, significance and method of your research project. Give detailed explanations of how you intend to involve human participants, whether the participants are underage, legally incompetent, or otherwise could be considered "captive", and the conditions of their involvement. Please try to confine your project overview to two pages (about 800 words) maximum.

This research project entitled "Pedagogy of Examinations: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations" aims to explore how exams are experienced by Chinese students and how these experiences and underlying school practices may be pedagogically interpreted and understood. It attempts to answer these two questions: How do Chinese students experience educational exams? And what pedagogical meanings can be drawn from these experiences? Students' lived experiences are the starting point and focus of this research project. The study is to suspend available arguments about outcomes and focus instead on the lived dimensions of student exam experiences. The hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology will be used as a major research approach for the study. Interpretive examination of students' lived experiences is an attempt to approximate the meanings of educational exams, thus enhancing the understanding of the pedagogy of exams.

Participant research activities include: conversational interview, written accounts of reminiscences, and phenomenological interpretation.

This hermeneutic phenomenological research project should contribute towards a thoughtful pedagogy of examination. It should provide an experiential understanding of the exam pedagogy and contribute to a fuller understanding of pedagogy. By turning to the lived experiences of students and by reflecting upon them, the dimensions of pedagogical meanings that underlie the students' exam experiences can be explored and further understood by teachers, parents, education scholars, test design experts, education administrators as well as education policy makers. We may become more sensitive, thoughtful and tactful in discerning what is appropriate and what is not appropriate in our daily interaction with students. The study will provide useful input for educational policy makers and administrators to develop more appropriate curriculum and test programs. It could be a timely study in a world of educational trend that moves fast towards internationalization and globalization. The research will also create a space for intercultural dialogue between East and West.

Non-participant research activities involve a linguistic discourse and document analysis of Chinese examination tradition and its education philosophy. Students' writings on their experiences relating to tests that are scattered in various publications will also be collected and interpreted when necessary.

Section 2: Procedures for Observing Ethical Guidelines

You are required to follow the specific procedures for observing the University of Alberta Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. Please describe clearly and concisely how you intend to observe the guidelines by answering each of the six points below. The accompanying Background Principles document provides detailed information on each of the six points below and you can also consult the full document on the university web site at http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html

You are required to attach:

- A copy of consent form(s),
- A copy of any additional letter(s),
- A copy of any data gathering instruments.

In the case of published instruments, only the name need be given.
In the case of interviews, sample interview questions must be included.

Please try to confine your written response to the following points to three pages or approximately 1000 words.

1. Who are the participants and how will they is involved in your research?

Participants in this research are teachers and students in selected secondary schools in China. Some students' parents may also be involved in some discussion groups. The participants will be asked to share their personal experiences relating to tests and exams in schools through conversational interview, written accounts of examination experiences, and make phenomenological interpretation.

Conversational interview: Participants will be involved in 1-2 conversational interviews with the researcher each lasting 1-2 hours. The purpose of such interviews is to get students' oral description of some particular moment relating to examination experiences. By creating a more conversational atmosphere, students and the researcher will be more likely to fully share some particular moments of their life relating to tests and exams in schools. These interviews will be audio-taped.

Written accounts: Participants will be asked to recall and share instances of their examination experiences through lived experience written accounts. These should be the accounts that are as much as possible uninterpreted, recalling a particular moment as one experienced it in an affective manner. Writing instructions and a half hour workshop with teachers and students will be done when necessary so as to get more descriptive and more experiential stories and anecdotes as research data.

Interpretation and Reflection: Once experiences are transformed into textual narratives some participants will be asked to edit the writings focusing specifically on a clear articulation of their experiences. Participants will be asked to reflect on the themes that may come out of these writings.

2. How will you explain the purpose and nature of your research to participants?

Participants will be fully informed of the aims and procedures of the project and of their rights to determine the degree of their involvement. Before being interviewed they will receive a copy of the interview questions as attached to this proposal (see Appendix I: Interview Questions). Where appropriate they will be provided with a copy of the material contained in this proposal and with any further information or clarification that they may need or desire.

3. How will you obtain the INFORMED consent of the participants?

The research consent form reproduced here (See Appendix IV and Appendix V)) will explain the terms of the proprietary and privacy aspects of the research program.

Participating teachers and parents will be asked to sign the consent form after they have had an opportunity to read the letter and listened to the researcher's explanation of the research.

4. Are children, captive or dependent populations used? If so, detail how consent be obtained.

Students participants will most likely be confined to Junior and Senior High School settings. Where a student is involved in an interview, the consent form above will be sent to the student to read and sign his/her name. Another Research Consent Form similar to the above (see Appendix III) will be sent to the student's parents to read and sign before the student can actually be involved in the research.

5. **How will you provide opportunities for your participants to exercise the right to opt out?**

Participants will be clearly informed that involvement is voluntary at every stage of this study (see Consent Form above).

6. **How will you address anonymity and confidentiality issues?**

All data will be treated anonymously. Tapes will be erased after transcription. Identifiable written accounts will be shredded.

7. **How will you avoid threat or harm to the participants or to others?**

No threat, harm or risk is involved in the project. In fact, participants will be encouraged to articulate their experiences with the researcher through the conversational interview. It is anticipated that all aspects of this study in which participants are involved will be beneficial for the participants as well as for the researcher in terms of the reflective insights gained and the practical skills acquired.

8. **How will you provide for security of the data?**

The data obtained in the research project will be kept in a safe place that no others except the researcher himself and his Doctoral Dissertation Supervisor, Max van Manen will have access to them in the course of the research. Once the project is completed, all the written and audio-taped data will be destroyed or erased permanently.

9. **If you plan to use the information in other than the research report, how will you seek permission for secondary use of the data?**

The research date obtained in this research will be mainly used in the researcher's Ph. D dissertation project. Secondary use of the data may include the researcher's academic activities such as conference presentations and paper publications. This has already been stated clearly in the Research Consent Form which the participants will be asked to read carefully and sign their names.

10. **If you involve assistants or transcribers in your research, how will you ensure that they observe the ethical guidelines?**

Not applicable.

11. Please describe any other procedures relevant to observing the ethical guidelines.

Not applicable.

Appendix II Lived Experience Description Writing Instruction

Teachers and students were asked to recall and write a particular moment of an examination experience. Students and adults were provided in Chinese with written instructions like the following.

School student:
Please recall from your recent or not so recent school experiences a moment that you vividly remember and that has to do with tests and exams that you had to take at school.
Describe and tell it just as you recall this particular moment. Just tell it as you experienced it. In other words, don't explain or talk "about" the experience but describe it as it happened or as you lived through it.
Please include concrete details such as where you were, what you saw, what exactly you did, how you felt, what you said, what the teacher said, what you mother or father did, etc. Include a description of how they spoke, how they looked, the tone of voice, their face, how it made you feel, etc.

Adult / Teacher:
Please recall from your childhood school experiences a moment that you vividly remember and that has to do with tests and exams that you had to take at school.
Describe and tell it just as you recall this particular moment. Just tell it as you experienced it. In other words, don't explain or talk "about" the experience but describe it as it happened or as you lived through it.
Please include concrete details such as where you were, what you saw, what exactly you did, how you felt, what you said, what the teacher said, what you mother or father did, etc. Include a description of how they spoke, how they looked, the tone of voice, their face, how it made you feel, etc.

Here are some helpful hints:

- Think of a particular experience
- Focus on a memory or feeling that still stands out because of its vividness or the circumstances of its happening.
- Describe from the inside, almost like a stream of consciousness state of mind (formulate your description in the present tense)
- You do not have to divulge embarrassing private matters, this is not a private but a personal lived experience description

- ➢ Do not attempt to exaggerate or beautify your description with poetic phrases, but rather aim to render a concise and concrete description of the moment when you experienced it.
- ➢ Make your writing short, straightforward. An incident only holds one story.

Here are some guidelines for you to do a self-evaluation of your account:

- ✓ An anecdote is a very short and simple story
- ✓ An anecdote usually relates one incident.
- ✓ An anecdote begins close to the central idea.
- ✓ An anecdote includes some important concrete detail.
- ✓ An anecdote often contains several quotes.
- ✓ An anecdote closes quickly after the climax.
- ✓ An anecdote has punch when it closes with punctum.

Your anonymity in this research project is assured. Please use a realistic pseudonym (first name and surname). In addition to your pseudonym, please indicate which grade you are in.

When our interview is completed, I will transcribe the tape or rewrite our interview notes into a final text and forward it to you for your final approval. Please feel free to edit, augment or delete portions of the script as you see fit. If you have any questions at any time please don't hesitate to contact me at 01-780-432-4340, or e-mail me at seanl@ualberta.ca or write to me at: Shuying Li, 10028-142st, Edmonton, AB., Canada. T5N 2N2.

Thank you for your valuable assistance in this research into the "Pedagogy of Examinations".

Appendix III INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pedagogy of Examinations: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations

Research Project

Part 1: The Questions

During the conversational interviews the students will be asked to share stories and instances of their school and out-school experiences that are directly or indirectly related to tests and exams. Questions will be engaged gradually and clarified conversationally with the participants.

Sample questions:
1). Can you describe a particular moment in school or in your home or in any other places relating to your study that you felt very sad or very happy? Please be as concrete as possible.
2). Can you recall a particular moment of your feeling towards an exam-related situation (for example, when you are taking an important exam, the moment to wait for the exam result or in a classroom activity…)
3). In that particular moment, what happened? How did you feel? For instance, how did you feel in your body … Try to be concrete.

Part 2: LED (Lived Experience Descriptions)

The following instructions for LEDs give a sense of the intent of the study and nature of the method.

As you think back over the years of your schooling, try to recall a single event or incident relating to tests and exams that stand out in your memory.

> Describe the incident in concrete, experiential detail, as if it happens right now. Focus on something that happened at a certain time on a particular day. Perhaps it happened in the classroom, in the school, or out of school. Include detail about what happened, with whom, when, where. Use dialogue if possible. Avoid explanations or interpretations. Don't explain what you "think" of it but describe it simply as you "lived" and "experienced" it.

Here are some helpful hints:

- Think of a particular experience
- Focus on a memory or feeling that still stands out because of its vividness or the circumstances of its happening.
- Describe from the inside, almost like a stream of consciousness state of mind (formulate your description in the present tense)
- You do not have to divulge embarrassing private matters, this is not a private but a personal lived experience description
- Do not attempt to exaggerate or beautify your description with poetic phrases, but rather aim to render a concise and concrete description of the moment when you experienced it.
- Make your writing short, straightforward. An incident only holds one story.

Here are some guidelines for you to do a self-evaluation of your account:

- ✓ An anecdote is a very short and simple story
- ✓ An anecdote usually relates one incident.
- ✓ An anecdote begins close to the central idea.
- ✓ An anecdote includes some important concrete detail.
- ✓ An anecdote often contains several quotes.
- ✓ An anecdote closes quickly after the climax.
- ✓ An anecdote has punch when it closes with punctum.

Your anonymity in this research project is assured. Please use a realistic pseudonym (first name and surname). In addition to your pseudonym, please indicate which grade you are in.

When our interview is completed, I will transcribe the tape or rewrite our interview notes into a final text and forward it to you for your final approval. Please feel free to edit, augment or delete portions of the script as you see fit. If you have any questions at any time please don't hesitate to contact me at 01-780-432-4340, or e-mail me at seanl@ualberta.ca or write to me at: Shuying Li, 10028-142st, Edmonton, AB., Canada. T5N 2N2.

Thank you for your valuable assistance in this research into the "Pedagogy of Examinations".

Appendix IV Research Consent Form (for participants above 18)

Pedagogy of Examinations: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations

Principal Investigator: Shuying Li
Phone: (780) 492 0749/432-4340

I (the undersigned) volunteer to participate in this research study on Pedagogy of Examinations: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations. The purpose of this study is to explore how exams are experienced by Chinese students and how these experiences and underlying school practices may be pedagogically interpreted and understood.

In agreeing to participate I know that my involvements may take 2 hours at maximum and may include (a) oral communication and recorded interviews of my experiences of examinations, (b) written recollections of personal experiences with exams, (c) editing, or augmenting transcripts of my interview to ensure accuracy, (d) discussion of the meaning of my experience(s) with exams, and (e) reflection on these experiences.

I understand that I will determine what involvements are appropriate for me and which interviews and discussions (if any) may be audio-taped. At any time I am free to discontinue my participation in this project or refuse to have selected material from interviews and oral communication used for this research.

When references are made to particular students/teachers or incidents are told about certain students/teachers, they will remain anonymous in the texts of this study.

I have received assurance from Shuying Li that the content of my taped interview or transcript will only be used for research purposes and will remain strictly confidential. Only the investigator of this project, and his graduate advisor, Dr. Max van Manen, will have access to this information and these materials will be erased or destroyed upon completion of the study. To ensure my confidentiality, a pseudonym will be substituted for my name on all data. The research data (stories, anecdotes, interpretations) may be used for publication purposes, but only after all names and identifying references have been changed to protect my privacy. I understand that the research data (stories, anecdotes, interpretations) may be used in the researcher's dissertation, academic publications or conference presentations, but only after my name has been changed to ensure my anonymity. In witness of the above, recognizing that I am free to withdraw or limit my participation in the study at any time, I affix my signature.

Participant:	Researcher: Shuying Li
Signed:	Signed:
Date:	Date:

Appendix V Research Consent Form (for Parent/Guardian)

Pedagogy of Examinations: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations

Principal Investigator: Shuying Li
Phone: (780) 492 0749/432-4340

I (the undersigned) agree to let my child _______________ volunteer to participate in this research study on Pedagogy of Examinations: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Pedagogical Significance of Chinese Students' Lived Experiences of Examinations. The purpose of this study is to explore how exams are experienced by Chinese students and how these experiences and underlying school practices may be pedagogically interpreted and understood.

In agreeing to let my child participate I know that my child's involvements may take 2 hours at maximum and may include (a) oral communication and recorded interviews of my child's experiences of examinations, (b) written recollections of personal experiences with exams, (c) editing, or augmenting transcripts of the interview to ensure accuracy, (d) discussion of the meaning of the experience(s) with exams, and (e) reflection on these experiences.

I understand that I will determine what involvements are appropriate for my child and which interviews and discussions (if any) may be audio-taped. At any time my child is free to discontinue his/her participation in this project or refuse to have selected material from interviews and oral communication used for this research.

When references are made to particular students/teachers or incidents are told about certain students/teachers, they will remain anonymous in the texts of this study.

I have received assurance from Shuying Li that the content of my child's taped interview or transcript will only be used for research purposes and will remain strictly confidential. Only the investigator of this project, and his graduate advisor, Dr. Max van Manen, will have access to this information and these materials will be erased or destroyed upon completion of the study. To ensure my child's confidentiality, a pseudonym will be substituted for his/her name on all data. The research data (stories, anecdotes, interpretations) may be used for publication purposes, but only after all names and identifying references have been changed to protect his/her privacy.

I understand that the research data (stories, anecdotes, interpretations) may be used in the researcher's dissertation, academic publications or conference presentations, but only after my child's name has been changed to ensure his/her anonymity. In witness of the above, recognizing that I am free to let my child withdraw or limit his/her participation in the study at any time, I affix my signature.

Parent(s)/Guardian __________	Researcher: Shuying Li
Signed:	Signed:
Date:	Date:

Appendix VI China Government Documents

教育部关于积极推进中小学评价与考试制度改革的通知

(THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCEMENT ON ACTIVELY PROMOTING AND PUSHING FORWARD THE REFORM ON THE ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION SYSTEM IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION)

(2002年12月27日）
教基[2002]26号

近年来，随着素质教育的全面推进，中小学评价与考试制度的改革得到了社会各界的广泛重视，各地积极探索，取得了有益的经验。但是，现行中小学评价与考试制度与全面推进素质教育的要求还不相适应，突出反映在强调甄别与选拔功能，忽视改进与激励的功能；注重学习成绩，忽视学生全面发展和个体差异；关注结果而忽视过程，评价方法单一；尚未形成健全的教师、学校评价制度等。为进一步贯彻落实《中共中央国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定》（中发［1999］9号）和《国务院关于基础教育改革与发展的决定》（国发〔2001〕21号）精神，坚持教育创新，全面推进素质教育，经国务院同意，现就积极推进中小学评价与考试制度改革有关问题通知如下：

一、中小学评价与考试制度改革的原则

1.中小学评价与考试制度改革，要全面贯彻党的教育方针，从德、智、体、美等方面综合评价学生的发展，培养学生热爱党、热爱社会主义、热爱祖国，诚实守信、助人为乐的高尚道德品质、终身学习的愿望和能力、健壮的体魄、良好的心理素质以及健康的审美情趣。

2.中小学评价与考试制度改革的根本目的是为了更好地提高学生的综合素质和教师的教学水平，为学校实施素质教育提供保障。充分发挥评价的促进发展的功能，使兰郭墓卑坛响□佯旮萄 X07榭腓峋叩墓卑黝?br> 3.对学生、教师与学校评价的内容要多元，既要重视学生的学习成绩，也要重视学生的思想品德以及多方面潜能的发展，注重学生的创新能力和实践能力；既要重视教师业务水平的提高，也要重视教师的职业道德修养；既要重视学校整体教学质量，也要重视在学校的课程管理、教学实施等管理环节中落实素质教育思想，形成生动、活泼、开放的教育氛围。评价标准既应注意对学生、教师和学校的统一要求，也要关注个体差异以及对发展的不同需求，为学生、教师和学校有个性、有特色的发展提供一定的空间。

4.评价方法要多样，除考试或测验外，还要研究制定便于评价者普遍使用的科学、简便易行的评价办法，探索有利于引导学生、教师和学校进行积极的自评与他评的评价方法。

5.对学生、教师和学校的评价不仅要注重结果，更要注重发展和变化过程。要把形成性评价与终结性评价结合起来，使发展变化的过程成为评价的组成部分。

6.重视学生、教师和学校在评价过程中的作用，使评价成为教育行政部门、学校、教师、学生和家长共同参与的交互活动。

二、建立以促进学生发展为目标的评价体系

7.以促进学生发展为目标的评价体系应包括评价的内容、标准、评价方法和改进计划。评价标准应该用清楚、简明的目标术语表述，主要包括基础性发展目标和学科学习目标两个方面。

（1）基础性发展目标：

道德品质。爱祖国、爱人民、爱劳动、爱科学、爱社会主义；遵纪守法、诚实守信、维护公德、关心集体、保护环境。

公民素养。自信、自尊、自强、自律、勤奋；对个人的行为负责；积极参加公益活动；具有社会责任感。

学习能力。有学习的愿望与兴趣，能运用各种学习方式来提高学习水平，有对自己的学习过程和学习结果进行反思的习惯；能够结合所学不同学科的知识，运用已有的经验和技能，独立分析并解决问题；具有初步的研究与创新能力。

交流与合作能力。能与他人一起确立目标并努力去实现目标，尊重并理解他人的观点与处境，能评价和约束自己的行为；能综合地运用各种交流和沟通的方法进行合作。

运动与健康。热爱体育运动，养成体育锻炼的习惯，具备锻炼健身的能力、一定的运动技能和强健的体魄，形成健康的生活方式。

审美与表现。能感受并欣赏生活、自然、艺术和科学中的美，具有健康的审美情趣；积极参加艺术活动，用多种方式进行艺术表现。

（2）学科学习目标：

各学科课程标准已经列出本学科学习的目标和各个学段学生应该达到的目标，并对评价方式提出了建议。

8．学生评价的措施与方法

教师要在教育教学的全过程中采用多样的、开放式的评价方法（如行为观察、情景测验、学生成长记录等）了解每个学生的优点、潜能、不足以及发展的需要。

建立每个学生的成长记录。成长记录应收集能够反映学生学习过程和结果的资料，包括学生的自我评价、最佳作品（成绩记录及各种作品）、社会实践和社会公益活动记录、体育与文艺活动记录，教师、同学的观察和评价，来自家长的信息，考试和测验的信息等。

学生是成长记录的主要记录者，成长记录要始终体现诚信的原则，要有教师、同学、家长开放性的参与，使记录的情况典型、客观、真实。

考试是评价的主要方式之一，考试应与其他评价方式相结合；要根据考试的目的、性质、内容和对象，选择相应的考试方法；要充分利用考试促进每个学生的进步。

9.每学期、学年结束时学校要对每个学生进行阶段性的评价。

评价内容应包括各学科的学业状况和教师的评语。评语应在教师对搜集到的学生资料进行分析，并与同学、家长交流、沟通的基础上产生。评语应多采用激励性的语言，客观描述学生的进步、潜能及不足。同时要制定明确、简要的促进学生发展的改进计划，帮助学生认识自我，树立自信。

小学生的学习成绩评定应采用等级制，不得将学生成绩排队、公布。

三、建立有利于促进教师职业道德和专业水平提高的评价体系

10.中小学教师评价制度的改革要有利于加强教师职业道德建设，促进教师业务水平的提高，建立有利于实施素质教育、发挥教师创造性的多元的、新型的中小学教师评价体系。

评价的内容主要包括：

职业道德。志存高远，爱国敬业；为人师表，教书育人；严谨笃学，与时俱进；热爱教育事业，热爱学生；积极上进，乐于奉献；公正、诚恳，具有健康心态和团结合作的团队精神。

了解和尊重学生。能全面了解、研究、评价学生；尊重学生，关注个体差异，鼓励全体学生充分参与学习；形成相互激励、教学相长的师生关系，赢得学生的信任和尊敬。

教学方案的设计与实施。能依据课程标准的基本要求，确定教学目标，积极利用现代教育技术，选择利用校内外学习资源，设计教学方案，使之适合于学生的经验、兴趣、知识水平、理解能力和其他能力；善于与学生共同创造学习环境，为学生提供讨论、质疑、探究、合作、交流的机会；引导学生创新与实践。

交流与反思。积极、主动与学生、家长、同事、学校领导进行交流和沟通，能对自己的教育观念、教学行为进行反思，并制定改进计划。求真务实，勇于创新，严谨自律，热爱学习。

11．教师评价的措施与方法。

建立以教师自评为主，学校领导、同事、家长、学生共同参与的教师评价制度。

建立以校为本、以教研为基础的教师教学个案分析、研讨制度，引导教师对自己或同事的教学行为进行分析、反思

与评价，提高全体教师的专业水平。

不得以学生考试成绩作为评价教师的唯一标准。

未经教育行政部门批准，任何社会团体、民间学术机构组织的教学评比结果不得作为教师晋升、提级、评优等的依据。

四、建立有利于提高学校教育质量的评价体系

12．中小学校评价制度的改革应有利于促进学生、教师和学校的共同发展。要改变长期以来以升学率作为唯一标准评价学校教育质量的做法，建立符合实施素质教育要求的中小学校评价体系。

评价的内容主要包括：

学校领导班子。全面贯彻党的教育方针，具有高度的责任心和实干精神；具有与时俱进规划学校进一步发展的能力；具有一定的理论修养和总结、积累教育经验、推进教育创新的能力；能遵照民主参与、科学决策、依法办事的原则管理学校，提高学校管理效能；具有团结合作的团队精神。

校长要做到遵纪守法，具有正确的教育观念，有一定的教育科学理论基础，有相关学科系统扎实的基础理论和专业知识，掌握现代教育技术，了解国内外教育改革的趋势，具有开拓进取的精神和民主、平等、实事求是的思想作风，有较强的组织管理能力、协调能力，有丰富的实际工作经验和较强的研究能力，能按照课程的要求对学校各环节工作进行有效管理。

制度与管理。学校应有符合素质教育要求和体现学校特色的办学目标和发展规划；有符合《基础教育课程改革纲要（试行）》精神的课程设置、实施措施与管理方案；重视校内外课程资源的开发和利用；有加强学校教职工队伍建设的措施；评价制度应有利于促进学生成长和教师发展；校园环境（包括人文环境和规章制度）应有利于学生身心健康。

教学研究制度。学校应建立以校为本、自下而上的教学研究制度，鼓励教师参与教学改革，从改革实践中提出教研课题；学校应有归纳课程、组织进行教学研究的能力，有促进教师专业发展的规划与措施。体育与文艺活动。学校要有活跃的学生体育与文艺社团，开展经常性的体育与文艺活动，广大学生都自觉积极参与。学校体育、文艺活动应注重特色。

13．学校评价的措施与方法。

建立以学校自评为主，教育行政部门、学生、家长和社区共同参与的评价制度。学校应对评价所涉及的各方面进行自我评估，准确了解学校的发展状况，针对存在的问题采取及时有效的改进措施。

评价学校应注重实证性的考察（如现场观察、访谈、问卷、听课、座谈、分析学校的原始记录和档案等）。

各级教育行政部门不得以升学率作为评价学校的标准。

五、中小学升学考试与招生制度的改革

14．在已普及九年义务教育的地区，公办学校实行义务教育阶段就近免试入学，民办和各类进行办学体制改革的小学、初中也不得以考试的方式选拔新生。

15．初中毕业、升学考试命题必须依据国家课程标准，杜绝设置偏题、怪题，要采用形式多样的考试方式，使学生在考试中有展示特长和潜能的机会。

初中升高中的考试与招生中，要综合考虑学生的整体素质和个体差异，改变以升学考试科目分数简单相加作为唯一录取标准的做法。高中录取标准除考试成绩以外，可试行参考学生成长记录、社会实践和社会公益活动记录、体育与文艺活动记录、综合实践活动记录等其他资料，综合评价进行录取。积极探索建立招生名额分配、优秀学生公开推荐等制度。

任何单位和个人不得以任何形式按中考成绩给地区、学校和学生排队并公布名次。

制定严格有效的监督制约制度和公示制度，坚决杜绝考试招生中的舞弊等腐败现象。

16．国家和省级教育行政部门要对初中升高中的考试命题和考试管理进行评价和指导。对不符合国家考试命题和考试管理要求的命题单位要提出改进要求，不能按要求改进的取消其命题权，另由省级教育行政部门组织命题，或者委托该省（自治区、直辖市）其他具备命题能力的单位组织命题。

六、普通高中会考制度的改革

17.各省、自治区、直辖市对普通高中会考具有统筹决策权。

由省级教育行政部门提出是否组织普通高中毕业会考方案，报省级人民政府批准，并报教育部备案。不再进行普通高中会考的地方要建立和完善普通高中毕业考试制度。

继续实施普通高中会考的地方要在省级教育行政部门的指导下，以全面实施素质教育为宗旨，坚持按照会考作为水平考试的原则进行命题。适当减少会考科目，加强对学生实验能力和其他实践能力的考查。经省级教育行政部门认定，部分质量好、信誉好的学校可免予会考，允许其自行组织毕业考试，对成绩合格者颁发会考合格证书。

18.逐步形成允许高中阶段其他学校的学生和社会人员参加会考的机制。要为学生提供多次考试机会和补考机会。

七、继续深化高考改革，积极探索综合评价、择优录取的高等学校招生办法

19.高等学校招生制度改革要继续按照有助于高等学校选拔

人才、有助于中学实施素质教育、有助于高等学校扩大招生自主权的原则，坚持德智体全面衡量、择优录取和公平竞争、公正选拔。

高考内容改革将更加注重对考生素质和能力的考查，积极引导中学加强对学生全面素质的培养。高考科目设置改革要将统一性与选择性相结合，在满足高等学校选拔人才的同时，促进学生全面发展与个性发展。高等学校选拔方式的改革要进一步探索建立在文化考试基础上综合评价、择优录取的办法。

高中应探索建立综合性的评价体系，增加反映学生在校期间参加研究性学习、社会公益活动及日常表现等真实、典型的内容，为高等学校招生工作提供更多的学生成长信息，逐步使中学对学生的评价记录成为高等学校招生择优录取的重要参考之一。

八、组织实施

20.各省、自治区、直辖市教育行政部门要高度重视中小学评价与考试制度的改革，加强领导，组织研究队伍，根据本通知精神制定具体实施办法，报教育部备案。在制定实施办法时，应充分吸纳已有的研究成果和实践经验，结合当地的实际情况全面部署评价和考试制度改革工作，并把这项改革同课程改革结合起来。实施办法要求真务实，防止搞形式主义。课程改革实验区要在推进新课程的同时，积极推进评价与考试制度的改革，并创造条件鼓励和支持教师积极参与研究和探索。

21.教育督导部门要将中小学评价与考试制度改革作为对地方教育行政部门和学校督导评估的一项重要内容，并根据本通知精神对现行督导评估标准进行必要的调整。

22.教研部门应贯彻课程改革的精神，认真研究评价内容和评价方式，提高为学校和教师服务的能力，促进教师的发展和学校课程实施水平的提高。

23. 各级教育行政部门要加强对本地区中小学校长、教师的培训，使中小学广大教育工作者了解评价与考试制度的改革方向和要求，掌握评价的基本方法，克服在部分地区、学校和教师中存在的陈旧评价和考试观念以及对评价与考试制度改革的疑虑；要以多种形式向全社会宣传中小学评价与考试制度的改革；宣传现代教育评价思想，转变传统的考试评价观念，使中小学考试评价制度的改革得到全社会的广泛支持。

中共中央国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定
(THE STATE COUNCIL DECISION ON FURTHER EDUCATION REFORM AND TO PROMOTING THE QUALITY EDUCATION)

（一九九九年六月十三日）

当今世界，科学技术突飞猛进，知识经济已见端倪，国力竞争日趋激烈。教育在综合国力的形成中处于基础地位，国力的强弱越来越取决于劳动者的素质，取决于各类人才的质量和数量，这对于培养和造就我国二十一世纪的一代新人提出了更加迫切的要求。我国正处在建立社会主义市场经济体制和实现现代化建设战略目标的关键时期。新中国成立 50 年来特别是改革开放以来，教育事业的改革与发展取得了令人瞩目的巨大成就。但面对新的形势，由于主观和客观等方面的原因，我们的教育观念、教育体制、教育结构、人才培养模式、教育内容和教学方法相对滞后，影响了青少年的全面发展，不能适应提高国民素质的需要。全党、全社会必须从我国社会主义事业兴旺发达和中华民族伟大复兴的大局出发，以邓小平理论为指导，全面贯彻落实党的十五大精神，深化教育改革，全面推进素质教育，构建一个充满生机的有中国特色社会主义教育体系，为实施科教兴国战略奠定坚实的人才和知识基础。

一、全面推进素质教育，培养适应二十一世纪现代化建设需要的社会主义新人

1．实施素质教育，就是全面贯彻党的教育方针，以提高国民素质为根本宗旨，以培养学生的创新精神和实践能力为重点，造就"有理想、有道德、有文化、有纪律"的、德智体美等全面发展的社会主义事业建设者和接班人。

全面推进素质教育，要面向现代化、面向世界、面向未来，使受教育者坚持学习科学文化与加强思想修养的统一，坚持学习书本知识与投身社会实践的统一，坚持实现自身价值与服务祖国人民的统一，坚持树立远大理想与进行艰苦奋斗的统一。

全面推进素质教育，要坚持面向全体学生，为学生的全面发展创造相应的条件，依法保障适龄儿童和青少年学习的基本权利，尊重学生身心发展特点和教育规律，使学生生动活泼、积极主动地得到发展。

2．实施素质教育应当贯穿于幼儿教育、中小学教育、职业教育、成人教育、高等教育等各级各类教育，应当贯穿于学校教育、家庭教育和社会教育等各个方面。在不同阶段和不同方面应当有不同的内容和重点，相互配合，全面推进。在不同地区还应体现地区特点，尤其是少数民族地区的特点。

实施素质教育，必须把德育、智育、体育、美育等有机地统一在教育活动的各个环节中。学校教育不仅要抓好智育，更要重视德育，还要加强体育、美育、劳动技术教育和社会实践，使诸方面教育相互渗透、协调发展，促进学生的全面发展和健康成长。

3．各级各类学校必须更加重视德育工作，以马克思列宁主义、毛泽东思想和邓小平理论为指导，按照德育总体目标和学生成长规律，确定不同学龄阶段的德育内容和要求，在培养学生的思想品德和行为规范方面，要形成一定的目标递进层次。要加强辩证唯物主义和历史唯物主义教育，使学生树立科学的世界观和人生观。要有针对性地开展爱

国主义、集体主义和社会主义教育，中华民族优秀文化传统和革命传统教育，理想、伦理道德以及文明习惯养成教育，中国近现代史、基本国情、国内外形势教育和民主法制教育。把发扬中华民族优良传统同积极学习世界上一切优秀文明成果结合起来。高等学校要进一步加强邓小平理论“进教材、进课堂、进学生头脑”工作。职业学校要加强职业道德教育。

进一步改进德育工作的方式方法，寓德育于各学科教学之中，加强学校德育与学生生活和社会实践的联系，讲究实际效果，克服形式主义倾向。针对新形势下青少年成长的特点，加强学生的心理健康教育，培养学生坚韧不拔的意志、艰苦奋斗的精神，增强青少年适应社会生活的能力。加强民族团结教育，规范国防教育，提高学生的国家安全意识，继续搞好军训工作并使之制度化。加强校园的精神文明建设，严禁一切封建迷信和其他有害于学生身心健康的活动及物品传入校园。加强共青团、少先队和学生会工作，在培养和提高学生素质方面发挥更大的作用。社会各方面要为青少年提供优秀的精神文化产品和德育活动基地，形成学校、家庭和社会共同参与德育工作的新格局。

4. 智育工作要转变教育观念，改革人才培养模式，积极实行启发式和讨论式教学，激发学生独立思考和创新的意识，切实提高教学质量。要让学生感受、理解知识产生和发展的过程，培养学生的科学精神和创新思维习惯，重视培养学生收集处理信息的能力、获取新知识的能力、分析和解决问题的能力、语言文字表达能力以及团结协作和社会活动的能力。

高等教育要重视培养大学生的创新能力、实践能力和创业精神，普遍提高大学生的人文素养和科学素质。职业教育和成人教育要使学生在掌握必需的文化知识的同时，具有熟练的职业技能和适应职业变化的能力。减轻中小学生课业负担已成为推行素质教育中刻不容缓的问题，要切实认真加以解决。各级政府都要建立健全减轻学生课业负担的监督检查机制。要重视婴幼儿的身体发育和智力开发，普及婴幼儿早期教育的科学知识和方法。

5. 健康体魄是青少年为祖国和人民服务的基本前提，是中华民族旺盛生命力的体现。学校教育要树立健康第一的指导思想，切实加强体育工作，使学生掌握基本的运动技能，养成坚持锻炼身体的良好习惯。确保学生体育课程和课外体育活动时间，不准挤占体育活动时间和场所。举办多种多样的群体性体育活动，培养学生的竞争意识、合作精神和坚强毅力。地方各级人民政府要统筹规划，为学校开展体育活动提供必要条件。培养学生的良好卫生习惯，了解科学营养知识。根据农村的实际条件和需要，有针对性地加强农村学校的体育和卫生工作。

6. 美育不仅能陶冶情操、提高素养，而且有助于开发智力，对于促进学生全面发展具有不可替代的作用。要尽快改变学校美育工作薄弱的状况，将美育融入学校教育全过程。中小学要加强音乐、美术课堂教学，高等学校应要求学生选修一定学时的包括艺术在内的人文学科课程。开展丰富多采的课外文化艺术活动，增强学生的美感体验，培养学生欣赏美和创造美的能力。地方各级人民政府和各有关部门要为学校美育工作创造条件，继续完善文化经济政策，各类文化场所（博物馆、科技馆、文化馆、纪念馆等）要向学生免费或优惠开放，鼓励文化艺术团体到学校演出高雅健康的节目。农村中小学也要充分利用当地文化资源，因地制宜地开展美育活动。

7. 教育与生产劳动相结合是培养全面发展人才的重要途径。各级各类学校要从实际出发，加强和改进对学生的生产劳动和实践教育，使其接触自然、了解社会，培养热爱劳动的习惯和艰苦奋斗的精神。建立青少年参与社区服务和社区建设的制度。中小学要鼓励学生积极参加形式多样的课外实践活动，培养动手能力；职业学校要实行产教结合，鼓励学生在实践中掌握职业技能；高等学校要加强社会实践，组织学生参加科学研究、技术开发和推广活动以及

社会服务活动。利用假期组织志愿者到城乡支工、支农、支医和支教。社会各方面要为学校开展生产劳动、科技活动和其他社会实践活动提供必要的条件，同时要加强学生校外劳动和社会实践基地的建设。

二、深化教育改革，为实施素质教育创造条件

8．基本普及九年义务教育和基本扫除青壮年文盲（简称"两基"），是全面推进素质教育的基础。地方各级人民政府要继续将"两基"作为教育工作的"重中之重"，确保2000年"两基"目标的实现和达标后的巩固与提高。各地要从实际出发，改造薄弱学校，提高义务教育阶段的整体办学水平。2000年后要继续实施"国家贫困地区义务教育工程"，加大对贫困地区和少数民族地区的扶持力度，继续加强发达地区对少数民族贫困地区的教育对口支援工作，切实解决农村初中辍学率偏高的问题，同时大力提高义务教育阶段残疾儿童少年的入学率。

9．调整现有教育体系结构，扩大高中阶段教育和高等教育的规模，拓宽人才成长的道路，减缓升学压力。通过多种形式积极发展高等教育，到2010年，我国同龄人口的高等教育入学率要从现在的百分之九提高到百分之十五左右。要在确保"两基"的前提下，积极发展包括普通教育和职业教育在内的高中阶段教育，为初中毕业生提供多种形式的学习机会。在城市和经济发达地区要有步骤地普及高中阶段教育。

高等职业教育是高等教育的重要组成部分。要大力发展高等职业教育，培养一大批具有必要的理论知识和较强实践能力，生产、建设、管理、服务第一线和农村急需的专门人才。现有的职业大学、独立设置的成人高校和部分高等专科学校要通过改革、改组和改制，逐步调整为职业技术学院（或职业学院）。支持本科高等学校举办或与企业合作举办职业技术学院（或职业学院）。省、自治区、直辖市人民政府在对当地教育资源的统筹下，可以举办综合性、社区性的职业技术学院（或职业学院）。

10．构建与社会主义市场经济体制和教育内在规律相适应、不同类型教育相互沟通相互衔接的教育体制，为学校毕业生提供继续学习深造的机会。职业技术学院（或职业学院）可采取多种方式招收普通高中毕业生和中等职业学校毕业生。职业技术学院（或职业学院）毕业生经过一定选拔程序可以进入本科高等学校继续学习。

高等学校和中等职业学校要创造条件实行弹性的学习制度，放宽招生和入学的年龄限制，允许分阶段完成学业。大力发展现代远程教育、职业资格证书教育和其他继续教育。完善自学考试制度，形成社会化、开放式的教育网络，为适应多层次、多形式的教育需求开辟更为广阔的途径，逐渐完善终身学习体系。

11．进一步简政放权，加大省级人民政府发展和管理本地区教育的权力以及统筹力度，促进教育与当地经济社会发展紧密结合。今后3年，继续按照"共建、调整、合作、合并"的方式，基本完成高等教育管理体制和布局结构的调整，形成中央和省级人民政府两级管理、以省级人民政府管理为主的新体制，合理配置教育资源，提高教育质量和办学效益。经国务院授权，把发展高等职业教育和大部分高等专科教育的权力以及责任交给省级人民政府，省级人民政府依法管理职业技术学院（或职业学院）和高等专科学校。高等职业教育（包括高等专科学校）的招生计划改由省级人民政府制定，其招生考试事宜由省级人民政府自行确定。

继续完善基础教育主要由地方负责、分级管理的体制。根据各地实际，加大县级人民政府对教育经费、教师管理和校长任免等方面的统筹权。地方各级人民政府要加强对职业教育和成人教育的统筹。学历教育由教育行政部门负

责管理。在高中及其以上教育的办学水平评估、人力资源预测和毕业生就业指导等方面，进一步发挥非政府的行业协会组织和社会中介机构的作用。

按照《中华人民共和国高等教育法》的规定，切实落实和扩大高等学校的办学自主权，增强学校适应当地经济社会发展的活力。加强对高等学校的监督和办学质量检查，逐步形成对学校办学行为和教育质量的社会监督机制以及评价体系。完善高等学校自我约束、自我管理机制。进一步扩大高等学校招生、专业设置等自主权，高等学校可以到外地合作办学。深化学校内部管理体制改革，进一步精简机构，减员增效。改革分配和奖励制度，实行多劳多得、优劳优酬。加大学校后勤改革力度，逐步剥离学校后勤系统，推动后勤工作社会化，鼓励社会力量为学校提供后勤服务，发展教育产业。

12．进一步解放思想、转变观念，积极鼓励和支持社会力量以多种形式办学，满足人民群众日益增长的教育需求，形成以政府办学为主体、公办学校和民办学校共同发展的格局。凡符合国家有关法律法规的办学形式，均可大胆试验。在发展民办教育方面迈出更大的步伐。鼓励社会力量以各种方式举办高中阶段和高等职业教育。经国家教育行政主管部门批准，可以举办民办普通高等学校。在保证适龄儿童、少年均能就近进入公办小学和初中的前提下，可允许设立少数民办小学和初中，在这个范围内提供择校机会，但不搞“一校两制”。积极发展以社区为依托的、公办与民办相结合的幼儿教育。要因地制宜地制定优惠政策（如土地优惠使用、免征配套费等），支持社会力量办学。

各级人民政府要加强对民办教育的管理、引导和监督，国家要加快民办教育的立法，促进民办教育的健康发展。各级各类民办学校都要依法办学，不断提高办学水平。

13．加快改革招生考试和评价制度，改变“一次考试定终身”的状况。改革高考制度是推进中小学全面实施素质教育的重要措施，按照有助于高等学校选拔人才、中小学实施素质教育和扩大高等学校办学自主权的原则，积极推进高考制度改革。进行每年举办两次高等学校招生考试的试点。高考科目设置和内容的改革应进一步突出对能力和综合素质的考查。鼓励有条件的省级人民政府进行多种形式的高考制度改革试验，扩大学校的招生自主权和考生的选择机会。逐步建立具有多种选择的、更加科学和公正的高等学校招生选拔制度。

在普及九年义务教育的地区，实行小学毕业生免试就近升学的办法。鼓励各地中小学自行组织毕业考试，采取多种形式改革高中阶段学校的招生办法，改革高中会考制度。建立符合素质教育要求的对学校、教师和学生的评价机制。地方各级人民政府不得下达升学指标，不得以升学率作为评价学校工作的标准。鼓励社会各界、家长和学生以适当方式参与对学校工作的评价。

14．调整和改革课程体系、结构、内容，建立新的基础教育课程体系，试行国家课程、地方课程和学校课程。改变课程过分强调学科体系、脱离时代和社会发展以及学生实际的状况。抓紧建立更新教学内容的机制，加强课程的综合性和实践性，重视实验课教学，培养学生实际操作能力。要增强农村特别是贫困地区义务教育的课程、教材与当地经济社会发展的适应性。促进教材的多样化，进一步完善国家对基础教育教材的评审制度。积极推进教学改革，提高课堂教学的质量，国家和地方要奖励并推广符合素质教育要求的优秀教学成果。

职业教育要增强专业的适用性，开发和编写体现新知识、新技术、新工艺和新方法的具有职业教育特色的课程及教材。高等教育要加快课程改革和教学改革，继续调整专业结构和设置，使学生尽早地参与科技研究开发和创新活

动，鼓励跨学科选修课程，培养基础扎实、知识面宽、具有创新能力的高素质专门人才。

15．大力提高教育技术手段的现代化水平和教育信息化程度。国家支持建设以中国教育科研网和卫星视频系统为基础的现代远程教育网络，加强经济实用型终端平台系统和校园网络或局域网络的建设，充分利用现有资源和各种音像手段，继续搞好多样化的电化教育和计算机辅助教学。在高中阶段的学校和有条件的初中、小学普及计算机操作和信息技术教育，使教育科研网络进入全部高等学校和骨干中等职业学校，逐步进入中小学。采取有效措施，大力开发优秀的教育教学软件。运用现代远程教育网络为社会成员提供终身学习的机会，为农村和边远地区提供适合当地需要的教育。

16．努力改变教育与经济、科技相脱节的状况，促进教育和经济、科技的密切结合。高等教育实施素质教育，要加强产学研结合，大力推进高等学校和产业界以及科研院所的合作，鼓励有条件的高等学校建立科技企业，企业在高等学校建立研究机构，高等学校在企业建立实习基地。采用多种形式，使高等学校科研机构进入企业，提高高等学校科技成果的转化率，加快实用科技成果向企业的转移，增强企业的技术创新能力，培育新的经济增长点。要创建若干所具有世界先进水平的一流大学和一批一流学科，在高等学校建设一批既出人才、又出成果的基础研究和应用研究基地，为国家创新体系建设和现代化建设作出贡献。继续推进城市教育综合改革。职业教育和成人教育要通过多种方式，为加快提高劳动者素质，为转岗、分流、下岗职工再就业提供教育和培训。

进一步推进农科教结合，全面推进农村教育综合改革，促进农村普通教育、成人教育和职业教育的统筹协调发展，使农村教育切实转变到主要为农村经济和社会发展服务上来。要把文化知识教育和扫除青壮年文盲与实用生产技术培训结合起来，与农民脱贫致富结合起来。要采取灵活多样的教育培训形式，抓紧培养一大批农村急需的实用技术推广人才、乡镇企业管理人才和医疗卫生人才。

三、优化结构，建设全面推进素质教育的高质量的教师队伍

17．建设高质量的教师队伍，是全面推进素质教育的基本保证。教师要热爱党，热爱社会主义祖国，忠诚于人民的教育事业；要树立正确的教育观、质量观和人才观，增强实施素质教育的自觉性；要不断提高思想政治素质和业务素质，教书育人，为人师表，敬业爱生；要有宽广厚实的业务知识和终身学习的自觉性，掌握必要的现代教育技术手段；要遵循教育规律，积极参与教学科研，在工作中勇于探索创新；要与学生平等相处，尊重学生人格，因材施教，保护学生的合法权益。

18．把提高教师实施素质教育的能力和水平作为师资培养、培训的重点。加强和改革师范教育，大力提高师资培养质量。调整师范学校的层次和布局，鼓励综合性高等学校和非师范类高等学校参与培养、培训中小学教师的工作，探索在有条件的综合性高等学校中试办师范学院。2010年前后，具备条件的地区力争使小学和初中阶段教育的专任教师的学历分别提升到专科和本科层次，经济发达地区高中阶段教育的专任教师和校长中获硕士学位者应达到一定比例。提高高等学校教师中具有博士学位教师的比例。

开展以培训全体教师为目标、骨干教师为重点的继续教育，使中小学教师的整体素质明显提高。中小学专任教师以及师范学校在校生都要接受计算机基础知识和技能培训。注意吸收企业优秀工程技术和管理人员到职业学校任教，加快建设兼有教师资格和其他专业技术职务的“双师型”教师队伍。地方各级人民政府要多渠道筹资设立骨干教师

专项资金，在大中小学培养一批高水平的学科带头人和有较大影响的教书育人专家，造就一支符合时代要求、能发挥示范作用的骨干教师队伍。

19. 建立优化教师队伍的有效机制，提高教师队伍的整体素质。全面实施教师资格制度，开展面向社会认定教师资格工作，拓宽教师来源渠道，引入竞争机制，完善教师职务聘任制，提高教育质量和办学效益。中小学根据学校编制聘用教师，可面向社会公开招聘，经县以上教育行政部门审批；高等学校依法自主聘任教师，吸引优秀人才从教。继续关心和改善教师的工作条件和生活待遇。

加强编制管理，精简富余人员，富余人员原则上在教育系统内部进行培训和安排。各地要认真做好各级各类学校转岗教师的管理服务工作，进一步建立和完善人才流动的社会化服务体系，搞好人才供求信息的收集和发布工作，开展转岗前职业培训，协调和促进教师的合理流动。地方各级人民政府的人事、劳动和社会保障、财政部门要提供必要的政策指导和经费支持。

20. 合理配置教师资源。各地要制定政策，鼓励大中城市骨干教师到基础薄弱学校任教或兼职，中小城市（镇）学校教师以各种方式到农村缺编学校任教，加强农村与薄弱学校教师队伍建设。城镇中小学教师原则上要有一年以上在薄弱学校或农村学校任教经历，才可聘为高级教师职务。采取优惠政策，吸引和鼓励教师到经济不发达地区、边远地区和少数民族地区任教。经济发达地区和城市也要采取多种形式，帮助少数民族地区和农村提高教师队伍水平。

21. 努力造就能够带领广大教师和教育工作者积极实施素质教育的学校领导以及管理干部队伍。学校校长在推进素质教育中具有特殊作用，要率先转变教育观念，把领导教职工创造性地实施素质教育作为重要职责。要继续巩固和完善中小学校长岗位培训和持证上岗制度，试行校长职级制，逐步完善校长选拔和任用制度，鼓励优秀校长到薄弱学校任职。对于富余的学校管理人员要转岗分流。

四、加强领导，全党、全社会共同努力开创素质教育的新局面

22. 全面推进素质教育，必须切实加强党和政府的领导。邓小平同志指出：“我们要千方百计，在别的方面忍耐一些，甚至于牺牲一点速度，把教育问题解决好。”各级党委和人民政府要切实落实教育优先发展的战略地位。全面推进素质教育是党和政府的重要职责。各级领导干部要转变观念，充分认识素质教育的重要性和紧迫性，把思想统一到中央的决定上来，认真贯彻落实。建立自上而下的素质教育评估检查体系，逐级考核省、市、县、乡各级党委和政府及其主要领导干部抓素质教育工作的情况。各级党委和政府及其有关部门要通力协作，为实施素质教育创造良好的政策环境，注意研究新情况和新问题，鼓励大胆实践，尊重群众的首创精神。重视和加强教育科学研究，提高政府决策和管理的科学性。

23. 全面推进素质教育，根本上要靠法治、靠制度保障。各级人民政府和各部门要切实做到依法行政，保证教育方针的全面贯彻执行。各级党政领导和广大教育工作者要深入进行教育法律法规的学习、宣传活动，提高法律意识，严格履行保护少年儿童和学生身心健康发展的法律职责，坚决制止侵犯学生合法权益的行为，抵制妨碍学生健康成长的各种社会不良影响。各地要依法保障教师的合法权益，不得拖欠教师工资。要整治校园内部和周边环境，维护

学校正常秩序。

继续完善国家教育立法，加大教育执法力度，加强教育法制机构和队伍建设，完善教育行政执法监督机制。制定有关素质教育的制度和法规，逐步实现素质教育制度化、法制化。

进一步健全教育督导机构，完善教育督导制度，在继续进行“两基”督导检查的同时，把保障实施素质教育作为教育督导工作的重要任务。

24．努力采取有效措施，切实加大教育投入，逐步实现国家财政性教育经费支出占国民生产总值百分之四的目标。各级人民政府必须按照《中华人民共和国教育法》的规定，确保教育经费有较大增长。中央决定，自 1998 年起至 2002 年的 5 年中，提高中央本级财政支出中教育经费所占的比例，每年提高 1 个百分点。各省、自治区、直辖市人民政府也要根据本地实际，增加本级财政中教育经费的支出。要进一步依法加强城乡教育费附加的征收和管理，农村教育费附加实行乡征、县管、乡用，确保完全用于教育。

进一步完善教育经费拨款办法，充分发挥教育拨款在宏观调控中的作用，不断提高教育经费的使用效益。政府的教育拨款主要用于保证普及义务教育和承担普通高等教育的大部分经费。地方各级人民政府要确保义务教育的资金投入并做到专款专用。在非义务教育阶段，要适当增加学费在培养成本中的比例，逐步建立符合社会主义市场经济体制以及政府公共财政体制的财政教育拨款政策和成本分担机制。加强教育经费的管理，严格禁止乱收费。认真组织实施教育储蓄、教育保险和助学贷款制度，完善奖学金制度。积极运用财政、金融和税收政策，继续鼓励社会、个人和企业投资办学和捐（集）资助学，不断完善多渠道筹措教育经费的体制。

25．社会用人制度对于实施素质教育有着重要的导向作用，改革用人制度是全面推进素质教育的当务之急。要依法抓紧制定国家职业（技能）标准，明确对各类劳动者的岗位要求，积极推行劳动预备制度，坚持实行“先培训、后上岗”的就业制度，继续改革大中专毕业生就业制度，使学生树立正确的择业观。地方政府教育部门要与人事、劳动和社会保障部门共同协调，在全社会实行学业证书、职业资格证书并重的制度。转变传统的人才观念，形成使用人才重素质、重实际能力的良好风气。

26．全面推进素质教育，是我国教育事业的一场深刻变革，是一项事关全局、影响深远和涉及社会各方面的系统工程。要进一步加强学校党的工作，充分发挥党员在实施素质教育中的模范带头作用。要通过新闻媒体的正确舆论导向，深入动员社会各界关心、支持和投身素质教育。学校、家庭和社会要互相沟通、积极配合，共同开创素质教育工作的新局面。

要继续认真落实国务院批转的《面向二十一世纪教育振兴行动计划》。全面推进素质教育，是党中央和国务院为加快实施科教兴国战略作出的又一重大决策，各级党委和人民政府要结合本地实际情况，创造性地把素质教育落到实处，在以江泽民同志为核心的党中央的领导下，高举邓小平理论伟大旗帜，为实现社会主义现代化建设宏伟目标和中华民族伟大复兴作出更大的贡献。

军队系统学校如何落实本文件精神，由中央军委作出决定。

国务院关于基础教育改革与发展的决定
(THE STATE COUNCIL DECISION ON BASIC EDUCATION REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT)

（2001年5月29日）国发[2001]21号

改革开放以来，我国基础教育取得了辉煌成就。基本普及九年义务教育和基本扫除青壮年文盲（简称“两基”）的目标初步实现，素质教育全面推进。但我国基础教育总体水平还不高，发展不平衡，一些地方对基础教育重视不够。进入新世纪，基础教育面临着新的挑战，改革与发展的任务仍十分艰巨。

为了切实贯彻《中华人民共和国教育法》、《中华人民共和国义务教育法》、《中华人民共和国教师法》、《中华人民共和国未成年人保护法》等有关法律，实施《中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十个五年计划纲要》，全面贯彻党的教育方针，大力推进基础教育的改革和健康发展，特作如下决定。

一、确立基础教育在社会主义现代化建设中的战略地位，坚持基础教育优先发展

1. 高举邓小平理论伟大旗帜，以邓小平同志“教育要面向现代化，面向世界，面向未来”和江泽民同志“三个代表”的重要思想为指导，坚持教育必须为社会主义现代化建设服务，为人民服务，必须与生产劳动和社会实践相结合，培养德智体美等全面发展的社会主义事业建设者和接班人。

   基础教育是科教兴国的奠基工程，对提高中华民族素质、培养各级各类人才，促进社会主义现代化建设具有全局性、基础性和先导性作用。保持教育适度超前发展，必须把基础教育摆在优先地位并作为基础设施建设和教育事业发展的重点领域，切实予以保障。

2. “十五”期间，地方各级人民政府要坚持将普及九年义务教育和扫除青壮年文盲作为教育工作的“重中之重”，进一步扩大九年义务教育人口覆盖范围，初中阶段入学率达到90%以上，青壮年非文盲率保持在95%以上；高中阶段入学率达到60%左右，学前教育进一步发展。

   按照“积极进取、实事求是、分区规划、分类指导”的原则，不同地区基础教育事业发展的基本任务是：

   （1）占全国人口15%左右、未实现“两基”的贫困地区要打好“两基”攻坚战，普及初等义务教育，积极推进九年义务教育和扫除青壮年文盲，适度发展高中阶段教育，积极发展学前一年教育。

   （2）占全国人口50%左右、已实现“两基”的农村地区，重点抓好“两基”巩固提高工作，义务教育学校办学条件明显改善，教育质量和办学效益进一步提高，高中阶段教育有较大发展，积极发展学前三年教育。

   （3）占全国人口35%左右的大中城市和经济发达地区，高水平、高质量普及九年义务教育，基本满足社会对高中阶段教育和学前三年教育的需求，重视发展儿童早期教育。到2010年，基础教育总体水平接近或达到世界中等发达国家水平。

3. “十五”期间，基础教育改革进一步深化，素质教育取得明显成效。德育工作的针对性、实效性和主动性进一步增强，青少年学生健康成长的社会环境进一步优化。形成适应时代发展要求的新的基础教育课程体系及国家基本要求指导下的教材多样化格局，建立并进一步完善适应素质教育要求的考试评价制度和招生选拔制度，有条件的地方要取得新的突破。

   全国乡（镇）以上有条件的中小学基本普及信息技术教育。初步形成适应基础教育改革和发展的教师教育体系，中小学人事制度改革取得显著进展，教师队伍的职业道德和业务水平明显提高。农村教育管理体制进一步完善，基础教育尤其是农村义务教育投入和按时足额发放中小学教师工资的保障机制进一步落实，社会力量办学进一步发展和规范。

4. 大力发展高中阶段教育，促进高中阶段教育协调发展。有步骤地在大中城市和经济发达地区普及高中阶段教育。挖掘现有学校潜力并鼓励有条件的地区实行完全中学的高、初中分离，扩大高中规模。鼓励社会力量采取多种形式发展高中阶段教育。保持普通高中与中等职业学校的合理比例，促进协调发展。鼓励发展普通教育与职业教育沟通的高级中学。支持已经普及九年义务教育的中西部农村地区发展高中阶段教育。
5. 重视和发展学前教育。大力发展以社区为依托，公办与民办相结合的多种形式的学前教育和儿童早期教育服务。加强乡（镇）中心幼儿园建设并发挥其对村办幼儿园（班）的指导作用。

二、完善管理体制，保障经费投入，推进农村义务教育持续健康发展

6. 加强农村义务教育是涉及农村经济社会发展全局的一项战略任务。农村义务教育量大面广、基础薄弱、任务重、难度大，是实施义务教育的重点和难点。各级人民政府要牢固树立实施科教兴国战略必须首先落实到义务教育上来的思想；牢固树立解决好我国农业、农村和农民问题，要依靠大力发展农村教育，提高劳动者整体素质的思想，切实重视和加强农村义务教育。
7. 进一步完善农村义务教育管理体制。实行在国务院领导下，由地方政府负责、分级管理、以县为主的体制。国家确定义务教育的教学制度、课程设置、课程标准，审定教科书。中央和省级人民政府要通过转移支付，加大对贫困地区和少数民族地区义务教育的扶持力度。省级和地（市）级人民政府要加强教育统筹规划，搞好组织协调，在安排对下级转移支付资金时要保证农村义务教育发展的需要。县级人民政府对本地农村义务教育负有主要责任，要抓好中小学的规划、布局调整、建设和管理，统一发放教职工工资，负责中小学校长、教师的管理，指导学校教育教学工作。乡（镇）人民政府要承担相应的农村义务教育的办学责任，根据国家规定筹措教育经费，改善办学条件，提高教师待遇。继续发挥村民自治组织在实施义务教育中的作用。乡(镇)、村都有维护学校的治安和安全、动员适龄儿童入学等责任。
8. 确保农村中小学教师工资发放是地方各级人民政府的责任。省级人民政府要统筹制定农村义务教育发展和中小学布局调整的规划，严格实行教师资格制度，逐县核定教师编制和工资总额，对财力不足、发放教师工资确有困难的县，要通过调整财政体制和增加转移支付的办法解决农村中小学教师工资发放问题。县级人民政府要强化对教师工资的管理，从2001年起，将农村中小学教师工资的管理上收到县，为此，原乡（镇）财政收入中用于农村中小学教职工工资发放的部分要相应划拨上交到县级财政，并按规定设立“工资资金专户”。财政安排的教师工资性支出，由财政部门根据核定的编制和中央统一规定的工资项目及标准，通过银行直接拨入教师在银行开设的个人帐户中。在此基础上，为支持国家扶贫开发工作重点县等中西部困难地区建立农村中小学教师工资保障机制，中央财政将给予适当补助。

    各级人民政府要进一步加强对教师工资经费的监管，实行举报制度，对于不能保证教师工资发放，挪用挤占教师工资资金的地方，一经查实，要停止中央财政的转移支付，扣回转移支付资金，并追究主要领导人的责任。
9. 各地要依据《中华人民共和国教育法》、《中华人民共和国义务教育法》规定，继续做好农村教育附加征收和管理工作。农村中小学危房改造的教育集资，必须严格按照有关规定执行。提倡农民通过义务劳动支持农村中小学危房改造。

    实行农村税费改革试点的地区，要把农村税费改革与促进农村义务教育健康发展结合起来，对因税费改革而减少的教育经费，有关地方人民政府应在改革后的财政预算和上级转移支付资金中优先安排，确保当地农村义务教育投入不低于农村税费改革前的水平。
10. 地方各级人民政府要把农村学校建设列入基础设施建设的统一规划，高度重视农村中小学危房的改造，统筹安排相应的校舍建设资金。乡（镇）、村对新建、扩建校舍所必需的土地，应按有关规定进行划拨。

    合理安排农村中小学正常运转所需经费。由省级人民政府根据当地农村中小学实际公用经费支出情况，核定本地区该项经费的标准和定额。除从学校按规定收取的杂费中开支外，其余不足部分由县、乡两级人民政府予以安排。
11. 采取有力措施，坚决刹住一些地方和学校的乱收费，控制学校收费标准，切实减轻学生家长特别是农村学生家长负担。在国家扶贫开发工作重点县等农村贫困地区义务教育阶段，实行由中央有关部门规定杂费、书本费标准的“一费

制”收费制度；对其他地区，由省级人民政府按照国家有关规定，结合当地实际，确定本地区杂费、书本费的标准。杂费收入应全部用于补充学校公用经费的不足，不得用于教师工资、津贴、福利、基建等开支。地方各级人民政府和任何单位不得截留、平调和挪用农村中小学收费资金；严禁借收费搞不正之风和腐败行为。

进一步加强监管和检查，完善举报制度，对违反规定乱收费和挪用挤占中小学收费资金的行为，要及时严肃查处。政府有关部门和学校要进一步加强财务管理，努力提高经费使用效益。

12. 针对薄弱环节，采取有力措施，巩固普及九年义务教育成果。地方各级人民政府要把农村初中义务教育作为普及九年义务教育巩固提高的重点，努力满足初中学龄人口高峰期的就学需求，并采取措施切实降低农村初中辍学率。将残疾儿童少年的义务教育作为普及九年义务教育巩固提高工作的重要任务。要重视解决流动人口子女接受义务教育问题，以流入地区政府管理为主，以全日制公办中小学为主，采取多种形式，依法保障流动人口子女接受义务教育的权利。继续抓好农村女童教育。

13. 因地制宜调整农村义务教育学校布局。按照小学就近入学、初中相对集中、优化教育资源配置的原则，合理规划和调整学校布局。农村小学和教学点要在方便学生就近入学的前提下适当合并，在交通不便的地区仍需保留必要的教学点，防止因布局调整造成学生辍学。学校布局调整要与危房改造、规范学制、城镇化发展、移民搬迁等统筹规划。调整后的校舍等资产要保证用于发展教育事业。在有需要又有条件的地方，可举办寄宿制学校。

14. 规范义务教育学制。“十五”期间，国家将整体设置九年义务教育课程。现实行“五三”学制的地区，2005 年基本完成向“六三”学制过渡。有条件的地方，可以实行九年一贯制。

15. 抓住西部大开发有利时机，推动贫困地区和少数民族地区义务教育发展。继续实施第二期“国家贫困地区义务教育工程”，省级人民政府也应制定相关政策，加大对贫困地区和少数民族地区义务教育的投入力度。继续实施“东部地区学校对口支援西部贫困地区学校工程”、“大中城市学校对口支援本地贫困地区学校工程”。采取切实措施，加大对少数民族地区实施义务教育的支持力度，提高适龄儿童入学率。重视加强边境地区义务教育。继续办好内地“西藏班”、“新疆班”。各级人民政府要完善并落实中小学助学金制度。从 2001 年开始，对贫困地区家庭经济困难的中小学生进行免费提供教科书制度的试点，在农村地区推广使用经济适用型教材。采取减免杂费、书本费、寄宿费等办法减轻家庭经济困难学生的负担。

16. 巩固扩大扫除青壮年文盲成果，大力推进贫困地区、少数民族和妇女扫除青壮年文盲工作。农村学校要积极参与扫除青壮年文盲工作，扫除青壮年文盲教育要与推广实用技术相结合。完善扫除青壮年文盲奖励机制，表彰先进。

三、深化教育教学改革，扎实推进素质教育

17. 实施素质教育，必须全面贯彻党的教育方针，认真落实《中共中央国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定》（中发[1999]9 号），端正教育思想，转变教育观念，面向全体学生，加强学生思想品德教育，重视培养学生的创新精神和实践能力，为学生全面发展和终身发展奠定基础。

实施素质教育，促进学生德智体美等全面发展，应当体现时代要求。要使学生具有爱国主义、集体主义精神，热爱社会主义，继承和发扬中华民族的优秀传统和革命传统；具有社会主义民主法制意识，遵守国家法律和社会公德；逐步形成正确的世界观、人生观和价值观；具有社会责任感，努力为人民服务；具有初步的创新精神、实践能力、科学和人文素养以及环境意识；具有适应终身学习的基础知识、基本技能和方法；具有健壮的体魄和良好的心理素质，养成健康的审美情趣和生活方式，成为有理想、有道德、有文化、有纪律的一代新人。

18. 切实增强德育工作的针对性、实效性和主动性。加强爱国主义、集体主义和社会主义教育，加强中华民族优良传统、革命传统教育和国防教育，加强思想品质和道德教育并贯穿于教育的全过程。主动适应新形势的要求，针对不同年龄学生的特点，调整和充实德育内容，改进德育工作的方式方法。

小学从行为习惯养成入手，重点进行社会公德教育，进行爱祖国、爱人民、爱劳动、爱科学、爱社会主义教育，联系实际对学生进行热爱家乡、热爱集体以及社会、生活常识教育。初中加强国情教育、法制教育、纪律教育和品格修养。高中阶段注重进行马列主义、毛泽东思想和邓小平理论基本观点教育。对中学生进行正确的世界观、人生观、价值观教育。要对中小学生进行民族团结教育。加强中小学生的心理健康教育。

丰富多彩的教育活动和社会实践活动是中小学德育的重要载体。小学以生动活泼的课内外教育教学活动为主，中学要加强社会实践环节。中小学校要设置多种服务岗位，让更多学生得到实践锻炼的机会。要将青少年校外活动场所建设纳入社区建设规划。各地要多渠道筹集资金，建设一批青少年学生活动场所和社会实践基地。建立健全各级青少年学生校外教育联席会议或相应机构，加强对青少年学生校外教育工作的统筹和协调。大力加强校园文化建设，优化校园育人环境，使中小学成为弘扬正气，团结友爱，生动活泼，秩序井然的精神文明建设基地。

19. 加快构建符合素质教育要求的新的基础教育课程体系。适应社会发展和科技进步，根据不同年龄学生的认知规律，优化课程结构，调整课程门类，更新课程内容，引导学生积极主动学习。小学加强综合课程，初中分科课程与综合课程相结合，高中以分科课程为主。从小学起逐步按地区统一开设外语课，中小学增设信息技术教育课和综合实践活动，中学设置选修课。普通高中要设置技术类课程。中小学都要积极开展科学技术普及活动。加强劳动教育，积极组织中小学生参加力所能及的社会公益劳动，培养学生热爱劳动、热爱劳动人民的情感，掌握一定的劳动技能。

农村中学的课程设置要根据现代农业发展和农村产业结构调整的需要，深化“农科教相结合”和基础教育、职业教育、成人教育的“三教统筹”等项改革，试行“绿色证书”教育并与农业科技推广等结合。

实行国家、地方、学校三级课程管理。国家制定中小学课程发展总体规划，确定国家课程门类和课时，制定国家课程标准，宏观指导中小学课程实施。在保证实施国家课程的基础上，鼓励地方开发适应本地区的地方课程，学校可开发或选用适合本校特点的课程。探索课程持续发展的机制，组织专家、学者和经验丰富的中小学教师参与基础教育课程改革。

20. 贯彻“健康第一”的思想，切实提高学生体质和健康水平。增加体育课时并保证学生每天参加一小时体育活动。开展经常性小型多样的学生体育比赛，培养学生团队精神和顽强意志。加强传染病预防工作和学校饮食卫生管理，防止传染病流行和食物中毒事件发生。制定并实施学生体质健康标准。有条件的地区要推行“学生饮用奶计划”。

21. 中小学要按照国家规定开设艺术课程，提高艺术教育教学质量。充分挖掘社会艺术教育资源，因地制宜地开展经常性的、丰富多彩的校内外艺术活动。各级人民政府和有关部门要重视艺术教育教师队伍建设、场地建设和器材配备工作，保证学校艺术教育的必要条件。

22. 教材编写核准、教材审查实行国务院教育行政部门和省级教育行政部门两级管理，实行国家基本要求指导下的教材多样化。国务院教育行政部门负责核准国家课程的教材编写，审定国家课程的教材及跨省（自治区、直辖市）使用的地方课程的教材；省级教育行政部门负责地方课程教材编写的核准和教材的审定。经国务院教育行政部门授权，省级教育行政部门可审定部分国家课程的教材。

改革中小学教材指定出版的方式和单一渠道发行的体制，试行出版发行公开竞标的办法，做到“课前到书，人手一册”。制定中小学教材版式的国家标准，保证教材质量，降低教材成本和价格。

23. 积极开展教育教学改革和教育科学研究。继续重视基础知识、基本技能的教学并关注情感、态度的培养；充分利用各种课程资源，培养学生收集、处理和利用信息的能力；开展研究性学习，培养学生提出问题、研究问题、解决问题的能力；鼓励合作学习，促进学生之间相互交流、共同发展，促进师生教学相长。各地要建立教育教学改革实验区和实验学校，探索、实验并推广新课程教材和先进的教学方法。各地要建设一批实施素质教育的示范性普通高中。有条件的普通高中可与高等学校合作，探索创新人才培养的途径。

广大教师要积极参加教学实验和教育科研，教研机构要充分发挥教学研究、指导和服务等作用。高等师范院校、教育科研院所要积极参与基础教育课程教材改革和教学实验。

注意借鉴国外教学改革的先进经验。奖励并推广基础教育教学改革优秀成果。

24. 继续减轻中小学生过重的课业负担，尊重学生人格，遵循学生身心发展规律，保证中小学生身心健康成长。要加强教学管理，改进教学方法，提高教学质量。要丰富学生课余生活，组织好学生课外活动。

进一步加强对滥发学生用书、学具及其他学生用品的治理。任何部门和单位不得向学校搭售或强迫学校订购教辅材料，中小学校不得组织学生统一购买各种形式的教辅材料。

25. 改革考试评价和招生选拔制度。探索科学的评价办法，发现和发展学生的潜能，帮助学生树立自信心，促进学生积极主动地发展。改革考试内容和方法，小学成绩评定应实行等级制；中学部分学科实行开卷考试，重视实验操作能力考查。学校和教师不得公布学生考试成绩和按考试结果公开排队。推动各地积极改革省级普通高中毕业会考。要按照有

助于高等学校选拔人才、有助于中学实施素质教育、有助于扩大高等学校办学自主权的原则，加强对学生能力和素质的考查，改革高等学校招生考试内容，探索多次机会、双向选择、综合评价的考试、选拔方式，推进高等学校招生考试和选拔制度改革。在科学研究、发明创造及其他方面有特殊才能并取得突出成绩的学生，免试进入高等学校学习。

26. 大力普及信息技术教育，以信息化带动教育现代化。各地要科学规划， 全面推进，因地制宜，注重实效，以多种方式逐步实施中小学“校校通”工程。努力为学校配备多媒体教学设备、教育软件和接收我国卫星传送的教育节目的设备。有条件地区要统筹规划，实现学校与互联网的连接，开设信息技术课程，推进信息技术在教育教学中的应用。开发、建设共享的中小学教育资源库。加强学校信息网络管理，提供文明健康、积极向上的网络环境。

积极支持农村学校开展信息技术教育，国家将重点支持中西部贫困地区开展信息技术教育。

支持鼓励企业和社会各界对中小学教育信息化的投入。各级人民政府和教育行政部门要重视常规实验教学，因地制宜地加强中小学实验室、图书馆（室）及体育、艺术、劳动技术等教育设施的建设，并充分向学生开放，提高教学仪器设备、图书的使用效益。鼓励各地乡（镇）中小学建立中心实验室、图书馆等，辐射周边学校。

27. 要认真贯彻实施《中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法》，进一步加强中小学推广普通话、用字规范化工作，推广普及国家通用语言文字，把普及普通话、用字规范化纳入教育教学要求，提高学生语言文字应用能力和规范意识。

四、完善教师教育体系，深化人事制度改革，大力加强中小学教师队伍建设

28. 建设一支高素质的教师队伍是扎实推进素质教育的关键。完善以现有师范院校为主体、其他高等学校共同参与、培养培训相衔接的开放的教师教育体系。加强师范院校的学科建设，鼓励综合性大学和其他非师范类高等学校举办教育院系或开设获得教师资格所需课程。支持西部地区师范院校的建设。以有条件的师范大学和综合性大学为依托建设一批开放式教师教育网络学院。

推进师范教育结构调整，逐步实现三级师范向二级师范的过渡。有条件的地区要培养具有专科学历的小学教师和本科学历初中教师，逐步提高高中教师的学历，扩大教育硕士的培养规模和招生范围。制订适应中小学实施素质教育需要的师资培养规格与课程计划，探索新的培养模式，加强教学实践环节，增强师范毕业生的教育教学与终身发展能力。

以转变教育观念，提高职业道德和教育教学水平为重点，紧密结合基础教育课程改革，加强中小学教师继续教育工作，健全教师培训制度，加强培训基地建设。加大信息技术、外语、艺术类和综合类课程师资的培训力度，应用优秀的教学软件，开展多媒体辅助教学。加强中青年教师的培训工作。

在教师培训中，要充分利用远程教育的方式，就地就近进行，以节省开支。对贫困地区教师应实行免费培训。

29. 加强骨干教师队伍建设。实施“跨世纪园丁工程”等教师培训计划，培养一大批在教育教学工作中起骨干、示范作用的优秀教师和一批教育名师。在教育对口支援工作中，援助地区的学校要为受援地区的学校培养、培训骨干教师。

30. 加强中小学教师编制管理。中央编制部门要会同教育、财政部门制定科学合理的中小学教职工编制标准。省级人民政府要按照国家有关规定和编制标准，根据本地实际情况，制定本地区的实施办法。各地要核定中小学教职工编制，规范学校内设机构和岗位设置，加强编制管理。对违反编制规定擅自增加教职工人数的，要严肃处理。

大力推进中小学人事制度改革。全面实施教师资格制度，严把教师进口关。优先录用师范院校毕业生到义务教育学校任教。高中教师的补充，在录用师范院校毕业生任教的同时，注意吸收具有教师资格的其他高等学校毕业生。推行教师聘任制，建立“能进能出、能上能下”的教师任用新机制。根据中小学教师的职业特点，实现教师职务聘任和岗位聘任的统一。建立激励机制，健全和完善考核制度，辞退不能履行职责的教师。

调整优化教师队伍。实施教师资格准入制度，严格教师资格条件，坚决辞退不具备教师资格的人员，逐步清退代课人员， 精简、压缩中小学非教学人员。政府部门和事业单位不得占用或变相占用中小学教职工编制，清理各类“在编不在岗”人员。

31. 依法完善中小学教师和校长的管理体制。落实《中华人民共和国教师法》规定的中小学教师的管理权限。县级以上教育行政部门依法履行中小学教师的资格认定、招聘录用、职务评聘、培养培训和考核等管理职能。

改革中小学校长的选拔任用和管理制度。高级中学和完全中学校长一般由县级以上教育行政部门提名、考察或参

与考察，按干部管理权限任用和聘任；其他中小学校长由县级教育行政部门选拔任用并归口管理。推行中小学校长聘任制，明确校长的任职资格，逐步建立校长公开招聘、竞争上岗的机制。实行校长任期制，可以连聘连任。积极推进校长职级制。

五、推进办学体制改革，促进社会力量办学健康发展

32. 基础教育以政府办学为主，积极鼓励社会力量办学。义务教育坚持以政府办学为主，社会力量办学为补充；学前教育以政府办园为骨干，积极鼓励社会力量举办幼儿园；普通高中教育在继续发展公办学校的同时，积极鼓励社会力量办学。

对民办学校在招生、教师职务评聘、教研活动、表彰奖励等方面与公办学校一视同仁。政府要对办学成绩显著者予以表彰奖励。社会力量举办的全日制中小学办学所得合法资金，在留足学校发展资金后，可适当安排经费奖励学校举办者。各级教育行政部门要加强对民办中小学、幼儿园教育教学的指导和监督，要认真审核其办学资格和条件，规范其办学行为，保证其全面贯彻党的教育方针。

33. 积极鼓励企业、社会团体和公民个人对基础教育捐赠，捐赠者享受国家有关优惠政策。对纳税人通过非营利的社会团体和国家机关向农村义务教育的捐赠，在应纳税所得额中全额扣除，具体办法另行制定。国家和地方对捐助基础教育有突出贡献的单位和个人予以表彰。

34. 稳妥地搞好国有企业中小学分离工作。制定政策，多渠道筹措资金，落实分离中小学的办学经费，保障企业所属中小学分离工作顺利实施。企业中小学的分离应尊重企业的意愿。

统筹安排好编制内具备教师资格的企业中小学教师。转由地方人民政府管理的企业中小学的校园、校舍、设施、设备等，不得挪用、侵占和截留，确保校产不流失。可通过办学体制改革的试验探索企业中小学分离形式。企业要继续办好未分离的中小学。

35. 加强对公办学校办学体制改革试验的领导和管理。公办学校办学体制改革要有利于改造薄弱学校，满足群众的教育需求，扩大优质教育资源。薄弱学校、国有企业所属中小学和政府新建的学校等，在保证国有资产不流失的前提下，可以进行按民办学校机制运行的改革试验。地方人民政府和教育行政部门要加强领导和管理，确保义务教育的实施和办学体制改革试验工作的健康开展。

六、加强领导，动员全社会关心支持，保障基础教育改革与发展的顺利进行

36. 各级人民政府要努力实践“三个代表”重要思想和实施科教兴国战略，宁可在别的方面忍耐一点，也要保证教育尤其是基础教育优先发展。要将基础教育工作列入议事日程，及时研究新情况、新问题，制订促进基础教育发展的措施，努力增加对基础教育的投入。

各级领导同志要经常深入中小学，了解情况，指导工作，帮助学校解决办学中的突出问题。要将基础教育工作的情况作为考核地方各级人民政府领导同志的重要内容。

各级人民政府及有关部门要认真履行各自的职责，切实将基础教育事业的发展纳入国民经济和社会发展计划，切实将基础教育作为基础设施建设和教育事业发展的重点领域，切实保障基础教育改革和发展的经费投入，切实保障中小学教师工资的足额按时发放，切实治理中小学乱收费，切实加强学校安全工作和周边治安环境的治理，切实加强青少年学生活动场所建设，切实加强文化市场的管理，为基础教育事业发展和青少年学生健康成长创造良好的条件和社会环境。

37. 坚持依法治教，完善基础教育法制建设。各级人民政府及有关部门要认真贯彻执行教育的有关法律法规，提高依法治教意识，严格履行法律赋予的职责，完善行政执法监督机制，加大执法监督力度，加强学校管理，依法保障学校、教师和学生的合法权益。

将依法治教与以德治教紧密结合。各级教育行政部门和全体教育工作者，要提高以德治教的自觉性，不断加强职业道德建设，为人师表，教书育人，管理育人，服务育人，环境育人。学校教育要坚持把德育工作摆在素质教育的首要位置，以科学的理论武装人、以正确的舆论引导人、以高尚的精神塑造人、以优秀的作品鼓舞人，把学校建成社会主义精神文明建设的重要阵地。

38. 切实加强学校安全工作。各级人民政府及有关部门和学校要以对人民高度负责的态度，从维护社会稳定的大局出发，牢固树立“安全第一”的意识，建立健全确保师生安全的各项规章制度。严格学校管理，狠抓落实，采取积极的预防措施，重点防范危及师生安全的危房倒塌、食物中毒、交通、溺水等事故。要重视和加强对师生的安全教育，增强安全防范意识和自我保护能力。尽快制定中小学生伤害事故处理的有关法规，建立健全中小学安全工作责任制和事故责任追究制，确保师生人身安全和学校教育教学活动正常进行。切实维护学校及周边治安秩序，加强群防群治，警民合作，严厉打击扰乱学校治安的违法犯罪活动。

39. 加强和完善教育督导制度。坚持督政与督学相结合，继续做好贫困地区“两基”评估验收工作，保证验收质量；对已实现“两基”的地区，建立巩固提高工作的复查和督查制度。

    积极开展对基础教育热点难点问题的专项督导检查。在推进实施素质教育工作中发挥教育督导工作的保障作用，建立对地区和学校实施素质教育的评价机制。“十五”期间，国家和地方对实施素质教育的先进地区、单位和个人进行表彰。

40. 重视家庭教育。通过家庭访问等多种方式与学生家长建立经常性联系，加强对家庭教育的指导，帮助家长树立正确的教育观念，为子女健康成长营造良好的家庭环境。工会、共青团、妇联等团体要开展丰富多彩的家庭教育活动。

    学校要加强和社区的沟通与合作，充分利用社区资源，开展丰富多彩、文明健康的教育活动，营造有利于青少年学生健康成长的社区环境。

基础教育是全社会的共同事业。继续支持开展“希望工程”、“春蕾计划”及城镇居民对农村贫困学生进行“一帮一”等多种形式的助学活动。新闻媒体要进一步加大对实施科教兴国战略，推进基础教育改革与发展的宣传力度。国家机关、企事业单位、社会团体等要发挥各自优势，共同努力，形成全社会关心、支持基础教育的良好社会氛围。

基础教育课程改革纲要(试行)

(THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DOCUMENT ON OUTLINE OF BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM REFORM)

改革开放以来，我国基础教育取得了辉煌成就，基础教育课程建设也取得了显著成绩。但是，我国基础教育总体水平还不高，原有的基础教育课程已不能完全适应时代发展的需要。为贯彻《中共中央国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定》(中发[1999]9 号)和《国务院关于基础教育改革与发展的决定》(国发[2001]21 号)，教育部决定，大力推进基础教育课程改革，调整和改革基础教育的课程体系、结构、内容，构建符合素质教育要求的新的基础教育课程体系。

新的课程体系涵盖幼儿教育、义务教育和普通高中教育。

一、课程改革的目标

1.基础教育课程改革要以邓小平同志关于"教育要面向现代化，面向世界，面向未来"和江泽民同志"三个代表"的重要思想为指导，全面贯彻党的教育方针，全面推进素质教育。

新课程的培养目标应体现时代要求。要使学生具有爱国主义、集体主义精神，热爱社会主义，继承和发扬中华民族的优秀传统和革命传统；具有社会主义民主法制意识，遵守国家法律和社会公德；逐步形成正确的世界观、人生观、价值观；具有社会责任感，努力为人民服务；具有初步的创新精神、实践能力、科学和人文素养以及环境意识；具有适应终身学习的基础知识、基本技能和方法；具有健壮的体魄和良好的心理素质，养成健康的审美情趣和生活方式，成为有理想、有道德、有文化、有纪律的一代新人。

2.基础教育课程改革的具体目标：

改变课程过于注重知识传授的倾向，强调形成积极主动的学习态度，使获得基础知识与基本技能的过程同时成为学会学习和形成正确价值观的过程。

改变课程结构过于强调学科本位、科目过多和缺乏整合的现状，整体设置九年一贯的课程门类和课时比例，并设置综合课程，以适应不同地区和学生发展的需求，体现课程结构的均衡性、综合性和选择性。

改变课程内容"难、繁、偏、旧"和过于注重书本知识的现状，加强课程内容与学生生活以及现代社会和科技发展的联系，关注学生的学习兴趣和经验，精选终身学习必备的基础知识和技能。

改变课程实施过于强调接受学习、死记硬背、机械训练的现状，倡导学生主动参与、乐于探究、勤于动手，培养学生搜集和处理信息的能力、获取新知识的能力、分析和解决问题的能力以及交流与合作的能力。

改变课程评价过分强调甄别与选拔的功能，发挥评价促进学生发展、教师提高和改进教学实践的功能。

改变课程管理过于集中的状况，实行国家、地方、学校三级课程管理，增强课程对地方、学校及学生的适应性。

二、课程结构

3.整体设置九年一贯的义务教育课程。

小学阶段以综合课程为主。小学低年级开设品德与生活、语文、数学、体育、艺术(或音乐、美术)等课程；小学中高年级开设品德与社会、语文、数学、科学、外语、综合实践活动、体育、艺术(或音乐、美术)等课程。

初中阶段设置分科与综合相结合的课程，主要包括思想品德、语文、数学、外语、科学(或物理、化学、生物)、历史与社会(或历史、地理)、体育与健康、艺术(或音乐、美术)以及综合实践活动。积极倡导各地选择综合课程。学校应努力创造条件开设选修课程。在义务教育阶段的语文、艺术、美术课中要加强写字教学。

4.高中以分科课程为主。为使学生在普遍达到基本要求的前提下实现有个性的发展，课程标准应有不同水平的要求，在开设必修课的同时，设置丰富多样的选修课程，开设技术类课程。积极试行学分制管理。

5.从小学至高中设置综合实践活动并作为必修课程，其内容主要包括：信息技术教育、研究性学习、社区服务与社会实践以及劳动与技术教育。强调学生通过实践，增强探究和创新意识，学习科学研究的方法，发展综合运用知识的能力。增进学校与社会的密切联系，培养学生的社会责任感。在课程的实施过程中，加强信息技术教育，培养学生利用信息技术的意识和能力。了解必要的通用技术和职业分工，形成初步技术能力。

6.农村中学课程要为当地社会经济发展服务，在达到国家课程基本要求的同时，可根据现代农业发展和农村产业结构的调整因地制宜地设置符合当地需要的课程，深化“农科教相结合”和“三教统筹”等项改革，试行通过“绿色证书”教育及其他技术培训获得“双证”的做法。城市普通中学也要逐步开设职业技术课程。

三、课程标准

7.国家课程标准是教材编写、教学、评估和考试命题的依据，是国家管理和评价课程的基础。应体现国家对不同阶段的学生在知识与技能、过程与方法、情感态度与价值观等方面的基本要求，规定各门课程的性质、目标、内容框架，提出教学和评价建议。

8.制定国家课程标准要依据各门课程的特点，结合具体内容，加强德育工作的针对性、实效性和主动性，对学生进行爱国主义、集体主义和社会主义教育，加强中华民族优良传统、革命传统教育和国防教育，加强思想品质和道德教育，引导学生树立正确的世界观、人生观和价值观；要倡导科学精神、科学态度和科学方法，引导学生创新与实践。

9.幼儿园教育要依据幼儿身心发展的特点和教育规律，坚持保教结合和以游戏为基本活动的原则，与家庭和社区密切配合，培养幼儿良好的行为习惯，保护和启发幼儿的好奇心和求知欲，促进幼儿身心全面和谐发展。

义务教育课程标准应适应普及义务教育的要求，让绝大多数学生经过努力都能够达到，体现国家对公民素质的基本要求，着眼于培养学生终身学习的愿望和能力。

普通高中课程标准应在坚持使学生普遍达到基本要求的前提下，有一定的层次性和选择性，并开设选修课程，以利于学生获得更多的选择和发展的机会，为培养学生的生存能力、实践能力和创造能力打下良好的基础。

四、教学过程

10.教师在教学过程中应与学生积极互动、共同发展，要处理好传授知识与培养能力的关系，注重培养学生的独立性和自主性，引导学生质疑、调查、探究，在实践中学习，促进学生在教师指导下主动地、富有个性地学习。教师应尊重学生的人格，关注个体差异，满足不同学生的学习需要，创设能引导学生主动参与的教育环境，激发学生的学习积极性，培养学生掌握和运用知识的态度和能力，使每个学生都能得到充分的发展。

11.大力推进信息技术在教学过程中的普遍应用，促进信息技术与学科课程的整合，逐步实现教学内容的呈现方式、学生的学习方式、教师的教学方式和师生互动方式的变革，充分发挥信息技术的优势，为学生的学习和发展提供丰富多彩的教育环境和有力的学习工具。

五、教材开发与管理

12.教材改革应有利于引导学生利用已有的知识与经验，主动探索知识的发生与发展，同时也应有利于教师创造性地进行教学。教材内容的选择应符合课程标准的要求，体现学生身心发展特点，反映社会、政治、经济、科技的发展需求；教材内容的组织应多样、生动，有利于学生探究，并提出观察、实验、操作、调查、讨论的建议。

积极开发并合理利用校内外各种课程资源。学校应充分发挥图书馆、实验室、专用教室及各类教学设施和实践基地的作用；广泛利用校外的图书馆、博物馆、展览馆、科技馆、工厂、农村、部队和科研院所等各种社会资源以及丰富的自然资源；积极利用并开发信息化课程资源。

13.完善基础教育教材管理制度，实现教材的高质量与多样化。

实行国家基本要求指导下的教材多样化政策，鼓励有关机构、出版部门等依据国家课程标准组织编写中小学教材。建立教材编写的核准制度，教材编写者应根据教育部《关于中小学教材编写审定管理暂行办法》，向教育部申报，经资格核准通过后，方可编写。完善教材审查制度，除经教育部授权省级教材审查委员会外，按照国家课程标准编写的教材及跨省使用的地方课程的教材须经全国中小学教材审查委员会审查；地方教材须经省级教材审查委员会审查。教材审查实行编审分离。

改革中小学教材指定出版的方式和单一渠道发行的体制，严格遵循中小学教材版式的国家标准。教材的出版和发行试行公开竞标，国家免费提供的经济适用型教材实行政府采购，保证教材质量，降低价格。

加强对教材使用的管理。教育行政部门定期向学校和社会公布经审查通过的中小学教材目录，并逐步建立教材评价制度和在教育行政部门及专家指导下的教材选用制度。改革用行政手段指定使用教材的做法，严禁以不正当竞争手段推销教材。

六、课程评价

14.建立促进学生全面发展的评价体系。评价不仅要关注学生的学业成绩，而且要发现和发展学生多方面的潜能，了解学生发展中的需求，帮助学生认识自我，建立自信。发挥评价的教育功能，促进学生在原有水平上的发展。

建立促进教师不断提高的评价体系。强调教师对自己教学行为的分析与反思，建立以教师自评为主，校长、教师、学生、家长共同参与的评价制度，使教师从多种渠道获得信息，不断提高教学水平。

建立促进课程不断发展的评价体系。周期性地对学校课程执行的情况、课程实施中的问题进行分析评估，调整课程内容、改进教学管理，形成课程不断革新的机制。

15.继续改革和完善考试制度。

在已经普及九年义务教育的地区，实行小学毕业生免试就近升学的办法。鼓励各地中小学自行组织毕业考试。完善初中升高中的考试管理制度，考试内容应加强与社会实际和学生生活经验的联系，重视考查学生分析问题、解决问题的能力，部分学科可实行开卷考试。高中毕业会考改革方案由省级教育行政部门制定，继续实行会考的地方应突出水平考试的性质，减轻学生考试的负担。

高等学校招生考试制度改革，应与基础教育课程改革相衔接。要按照有助于高等学校选拔人才、有助于中学实施素质教育、有助于扩大高等学校办学自主权的原则，加强对学生能力和素质的考查，改革高等学校招生考试内容，探索提供多次机会、双向选择、综合评价的考试、选拔方式。

考试命题要依据课程标准，杜绝设置偏题、怪题的现象。教师应对每位学生的考试情况做出具体的分析指导，不得公布学生考试成绩并按考试成绩排列名次。

七、课程管理

16.为保障和促进课程对不同地区、学校、学生的要求，实行国家、地方和学校三级课程管理。

教育部总体规划基础教育课程，制订基础教育课程管理政策，确定国家课程门类和课时。制订国家课程标准，积极试行新的课程评价制度。

省级教育行政部门依据国家课程管理政策和本地实际情况，制订本省(自治区、直辖市)实施国家课程的计划，规划地方课程，报教育部备案并组织实施。经教育部批准，省级教育行政部门可单独制订本省(自治区、直辖市)范围内使用的课程计划和课程标准。

学校在执行国家课程和地方课程的同时，应视当地社会、经济发展的具体情况，结合本校的传统和优势、学生的兴趣和需要，开发或选用适合本校的课程。各级教育行政部门要对课程的实施和开发进行指导和监督，学校有权力和责任反映在实施国家课程和地方课程中所遇到的问题。

八、教师的培养和培训

17.师范院校和其他承担基础教育师资培养和培训任务的高等学校和培训机构应根据基础教育课程改革的目标与内容，调整培养目标、专业设置、课程结构，改革教学方法。中小学教师继续教育应以基础教育课程改革为核心内容。

地方教育行政部门应制定有效、持续的师资培训计划，教师进修培训机构要以实施新课程所必需的培训为主要任务，确保培训工作与新一轮课程改革的推进同步进行。

九、课程改革的组织与实施

18.教育部领导并统筹管理全国基础教育课程改革工作；省级教育行政部门领导并规划本省(自治区、直辖市)的基础教育课程改革工作。

19.基础教育课程改革是一项系统工程。应始终贯彻“先立后破，先实验后推广”的工作方针。各省(自治区、直辖市)都应建立课程改革实验区，实验区应分层推进，发挥示范、培训和指导的作用，加快实验区的滚动发展，为过渡到新课程做好准备。

基础教育课程改革必须坚持民主参与、科学决策的原则，积极鼓励高等院校、科研院所的专家、学者和中小学教师投身中小学课程教材改革；支持部分师范大学成立“基础教育课程研究中心”，开展中小学课程改革的研究工作，并积极参与基础教育课程改革实践；在教育行政部门的领导下，各中小学教研机构要把基础教育课程改革作为中心工作，充分发挥教学研究、指导和服务等作用，并与基础教育课程研究中心建立联系，发挥各自的优势，共同推进基础教育课程改革；建立教育部门、家长以及社会各界有效参与课程建设和学校管理的制度；积极发挥新闻媒体的作用，引导社会各界深入讨论、关心并支持课程改革。

20.建立课程教材持续发展的保障机制。各级教育行政部门应设立基础教育课程改革的专项经费。

为使新课程体系在实验区顺利推进，教育部在高考、中考、课程设置等方面对实验区给予政策支持。对参加基础教育课程改革的单位、集体、个人所取得的优秀成果，予以奖励。